



TRANSFORMATIONAL **GROUP** TIME

MATURING WITH ONE ANOTHER



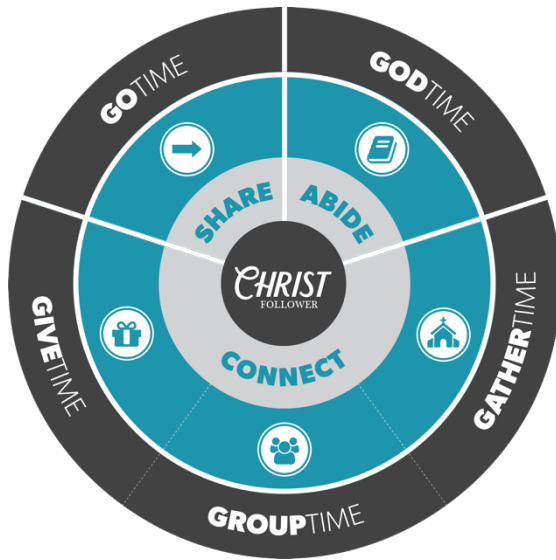


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Preface

The human longing for community and connection is almost universal. Each of us, deep inside, have a built-in fear of loneliness. As a result, people automatically tend to form communities. In almost every case, the goal is simply to belong somewhere. This, then, raises an important question: Is Christian community different? Is Christian community merely a place for support and belonging or is there more?

In this study, we will explore how Christian community offers more than a place to belong; It offers a place to be utterly transformed.

If you're joining a small group at Harvest Toronto West for the first time, we welcome you with open arms and pray that you too will be utterly transformed by connecting with others.

Why "Transformational" Group Time?

You may be asking, "Where does the idea of transformation in community come from?"

The vision for transformational GROUP Time comes from Eph 4:22-25,

[You have been taught in Christ] ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

While verses 22-24 describe *what transformation is* (putting off our old self and putting on our new self), verse 25 describes *how transformation happens* (by speaking the truth with each other). Verse 25 shows us that transformation is a team sport, not an individual sport. This is why our GROUP times must be transformational. May we embark on GROUP time at Harvest Toronto West with a hunger to be transformed together.

How to Use this Curriculum

For each session, you will encounter the following sections. Here is guide for how to use each of these sections.

Introduction

This section serves to introduce the session topic and get us thinking deeper. Read it to whet your appetite for diving into God's word.

Read

Read the passage slowly two or three times, stopping to understand and savour God's word.

Study

Make observations about the passage and answer the questions in this section. Dig into the text by writing some initial observations in the lined spaces provided.

Respond

This section serves to ask questions that go beyond understanding the text and start asking, "How would my life be different if I truly perceived this text?" Reflect on these questions and write some initial thoughts using the lined spaces provided.

Pray

Use the provided prayer as an "on-ramp" to start praying. Then, "get on the highway" by praying together as a small group.

Important Note: In order to maximize the benefit of your small group discussion, read through the session at home before meeting with your group. Mark up each section on your own and fill in some initial answers to the questions.

SESSION 1

**We are one Body:
CONNECT**

Introduction

If there is any value that our culture prizes today, it is individual independence. It has given each of us a deep desire to choose for ourselves what we want to do and be for ourselves what we want to be regardless of what the community may think. "Be yourself" has become the slogan of our generation.

However, somewhere along the way we began to long for what we lost when we kicked community to the curb. Deep down, we still believed that we were made for community and we began to crave it again. As such, the last decade has seen a whole slew of modern technologies created in an attempt for us to connect with one another, but it still feels like the connection falls short. We are bombarded with status updates, likes and retweets but it still feels like something is missing. We find ourselves asking: Where can I find a truly deep connection?

In this session, we will explore the Bible's teaching on the body of Christ and discover that Christ-followers are connected in a profoundly deep way that satisfies the longings of our hearts.

Read

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Cor 12:12–27

Study

1. If you had the option of living without a body part, which would you choose? How would your life be different without this body part? Why is this such a difficult question to answer?

2. How is the church described in verses 12-13 and verse 27? In what ways is there unity? In what ways is there diversity?

3. Have you ever walked into a new church and felt “No one needs me”? How does the body metaphor in verses 14-17 help to combat this lie?

Have you ever walked into a new church and felt “I don’t need anyone”? How does the body metaphor in verse 21 help to combat this lie

4. In verses 22-26, how does the body metaphor help us understand how Christian communities should respond to “weaker”, “less honourable” or “unpresentable” parts? What about “suffer[ing]” parts?

Respond

5. Which of the following statements do you use to isolate yourself: "No one needs me." or "I don't need anyone."? When does this happen most? What is wrong with these sentiments?

6. At the root, both inferiority and superiority are prideful. On one hand, superiority ("I don't need anyone.") is obviously prideful. It says, "I'm so gifted that I can do without community. On the other hand, inferiority ("No one needs me."), while seemingly humble, is actually prideful as well. It says, "I don't have the gifts that those other people have, so God must have arranged and chosen (Eph 4:18) wrong."

Have you ever seen a neglect of the body of Christ as prideful? In what areas do you detect prideful isolation in your life?

How would your life change if you put aside this pride?

7. Verse 18 and 25 make it clear that it is God himself who "arranged", "chose" and "composed" the body. How does this change how we value the body and its parts?

Pray

Father, thank you that you have made us one body and given us one Spirit (v12-13, 27). Jesus, we praise you for reconciling us by your blood (Eph 2:13). Forgive me when I forget the common ground that I have with all fellow believers. Help our small group come together as one.

Father, thank you that you have so designed the body that each part is needed (v14-17, 21). Forgive me in the times when I say, "No one needs me" or "I don't need anyone." These feelings are both absurd and prideful. Please help me to put aside my pride and play my part in the body of Christ. Guard my heart from isolation and remind me of the dangers of isolation ("Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment." – Pr 18:1).

Father, I praise you that you are the God who affirms the weak, honours the less honourable and safeguards the unrepresentable. Forgive me when I don't have your heart to love every single member of the body, even the ones that seem lesser. Please make us a small group who loves the lowly. Make us so united that we would rejoice together when one of us rejoices and mourn together when one of us mourns.

SESSION 2

**We are one Family:
BE DEVOTED to One
Another**

Introduction

Family. For some, this word evokes cherished memories of loving homes. For others, this word represents the deep pain and disappointment that has resulted from a difficult family upbringing. But in almost all cases, we can probably agree that a deep longing and desire for family is such a core part of who we are. When family is far, absent or broken in our lives, we tend to feel like strangers to those around us and our hearts long to be known and loved. We long for the place where we can be safe, accepted, loved and “part of the family”.

Today, modern changes to our culture have only served to exacerbate this angst for family. Increased job mobility has led to biological family being far away, resulting in much greater isolation than in the past. The increase in marital breakdowns has caused the family to be fractured in profound ways. At no other time has this longing for family been more felt in the depths of our hearts.

How does the gospel answer this longing? In this session, we search for this answer by exploring the Bible’s teaching that the church is the household of God. And we pray that in this session, your heart will begin to thirst for the church family described in God’s word.

Who are we? We are ONE family.

Read

12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Eph 2:12-13, 17-19

Study

1. What emotions are evoked when you think of your family (or your household)? Spend some time sharing about your family upbringing.

2. How would you react to the prospect of church members becoming as close as family members? Have you ever experienced this before?

3. Verse 12 describes that we were alienated from both God AND God's people. What phrases are used in these verses to describe this alienation?

4. According to verses 13 and 17-18, how did Christ totally reverse this alienation? What did he accomplish?

5. According to verses 19, how has our standing and status changed because of what Christ has accomplished?

Respond

6. Why is it so important for us to “remember” (v12) that our sin has caused alienation with both God AND those around us? What happens when we forget our former state?

7. According to verses 13 and 17-18, Christ reconciled us to one another by bringing us near (v13), bringing peace (v17) and giving equal access through one Spirit to the Father (v18). While those are free gifts to us, they were deeply costly to Christ – it was paid for by his blood (v13).

TRUTH: Jesus bled and died so that his church could be a family (“household of God”).

How does this truth prevent us for taking our church family for granted? How does this truth empower us to treasure and preserve our church family relationships?

HEART CHECK: How are you doing in this regard? Do you tend to you take your church family for granted? How can the truth of the gospel be used in your life today to begin treasuring and preserving church family in your life?

8. Verse 18 declares an awesome truth: We are not strangers anymore. We are family.

Explore the verses below and answer the following questions:

- a) According to this verse, what is the church family to be marked by?
b) How can my small group help me to grow in this area?

17 A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.

Prov 17:17

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **10** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Rom 12:9–10

Pray

Father, thank you that you have given us one family (v18). Thank you for filling the longings of our hearts. Forgive us when we forget that we were once strangers (v12), but now we are family (v18). Help us to recall the privilege of being called children of God (1 John 3:1).

Jesus, thank you for your blood that reconciles us to God and to one another (v13). Forgive us when we neglect the family of God, forgetting that it was your blood was the cost of this family being formed. Forgive us for trampling over your blood. Please guard our hearts from taking your household for granted. Make us loyal (Prov 17:17) and affectionate siblings (Rom 12:10). Lord, please make our small group a close-knit family – your close-knit family.

SESSION 3

Sin deceives:

EXHORT one another

Introduction

So far, we have examined what the Bible says about uncommon Christian community. In session 1, we meditated on the truth that we are one interconnected body. In session 2, we meditated on the truth that we are one devoted family. However, while our hearts crave this type of community, we often fall short of these deals. Why? The Bible's answer is simple: SIN.

In sessions 3-5, we will examine how both individual and corporate sins cause uncommon Christian community to fail. In this session, we start by focusing on our own individual sin.

For some of us, our ideal church scenario is to be an isolated island – left to ourselves and minding our own business. For others, our ideal church scenario is to be a gated house – we may desire neighbours around us, but we are uncomfortable with people getting too close and up in our business. When encouraged to get into deep, vulnerable community for the sake of killing sin, we often chafe and say, “I can deal with my sin on my own. Thank you very much!”

However, this begs the question, is there danger to being isolated islands or gated houses? What might sin do in our lives without deep, vulnerable community? According the Bible, we get a stunning revelation that has huge implications on our community lives:

Sin deceives.

Read

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Heb 3:12-13

Study

1. If you were asked, "How big of a role should community play in helping you kill your sin?", how would you respond?

2. According to verse 12, what disease must every Christian "take care" of? What does this verse say about the treachery of this disease? What are the stakes?

3. According to verse 13, what is the antidote to the disease found in verse 12?

As modern people, if we were given the option of re-writing the antidote for verse 12, verse 13 would probably say something like this, "But read the Bible privately and pray privately to fix your unbelieving heart and guard you from following away." While these are blessed and necessary personal disciplines, the author of the book of Hebrews suggests something entirely different: EXHORT one another URGENTLY and CONSISTENTLY. The answer to the danger of falling away from the living God is community - Community that urgently and consistently exhorts (urges/implores) one another.

4. In light of this truth, how would you respond differently to the question "How big of a role should community play in helping you kill your sin?"?

5. According to the last part of Heb 3:13, we exhort one another for the following purpose: "that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." What can we learn about our sin from this truth?

Respond

6. Sometimes, we can subconsciously believe the following lie: "My sin is a problem, but still manageable. If I can manage it well, it won't harm me that much." Do you believe that lie? How or how not?

In response, v12 raises the alarm to the danger of our sin. There is a potential in all of us to be diseased with "an evil, unbelieving heart that can cause us to fall away from the living God." That is sobering! How does that change how you view your sin? How are you viewing your sin right now?

7. Heb 3:13 explores the nature of sin further. Sin deceives. Paul Tripp explains this in the following way:

Sin is deceptive, and think with me about who it deceives first. I have no difficulty recognizing the sin of the people around me, but I can be quite unprepared when my sin is pointed out. Sin deceives ten out of ten people reading this. But it is not enough even to say

that; there is more that needs to be said. It needs to be noted that spiritual blindness is not like physical blindness. When you are physically blind, you know that you are blind, and you do things to compensate for this significant physical deficit. But spiritually blind people are not only blind; they are blind to their own blindness. They are blind, but they think that they see well. So the spiritually blind person walks around with the delusion that no one has a more accurate view of him than he does. He thinks he sees and is unaware of the powerfully important things in his heart that he absolutely does not see at all.¹

Are you sobered by the following truth: Our sin blinds us to our own blindness? Do you have others in your life who have alerted you to sinful blind spots? What blind spots have you discovered?

8. We are often deceived to think that sin is like the common cold and community is like Vitamin C (i.e. It is helpful, but not vital). However, Heb 3:12-13 shows us that sin is more like cancer and community is like chemotherapy (i.e. Not only is it helpful, it is absolutely vital for survival)

How does this reality change your commitment to your small group? What are practical ways to commit to exhort one another?

Because of sin's deception and hardening effects, community is not merely advisable, but absolutely indispensable. In your breakout time, disclose sinful blind spots which others have lovingly pointed out in the past and invite your small group members to consistently and urgently exhort you to put aside that sin over the coming months. If you are unaware of your blind spots, invite your small group members to keep watch and help you discern your blindspots over the coming months. They are blind spots, so you need others to help you spot them!

¹ Chapter 5 of "Dangerous Calling" by Paul Tripp

Pray

Father, would you forgive me for overlooking how dangerous sin can be in my life. Forgive me for thinking that I can manage it and it won't harm me. If left untreated, my sin can cause me to fall away from the living God. Lord, would you sober me by that truth. God, I thank you that ultimately, in Christ, I have your Spirit who can empower me to put my sin to death (Rom 8:13).

Father, thank you for bringing Christian community into my life. Please forgive me for often neglecting my brothers and sisters in Christ! I need them! Without them, I will be blind to my sin! Lord, please help me to be deeply thankful for their presence and exhortation in my life. Lord, please make me more vulnerable to invasive community so that my sin's deception may be unmasked and I may be transformed. Help me to cherish and invite their urgent and consistent exhortation in my life. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

SESSION 4

Sin destroys:

BUILD UP one another

Introduction

In our previous session, we discussed the deceptiveness of sin in each of our individual lives. Left without the exhortation of community, the remaining sin all of us will harden us. As such, invasive, truth-telling community is absolutely crucial in our Christian lives. But this begs the question:

HOW are we to address sin in each other's lives?

Our culture gives us two approaches to answering this question: a traditional and a modern approach.

The traditional approach gives this answer: "By giving unfiltered, hard truth to one another without regard for feelings." However, this approach can be cruelly brutal, thus lacking any power for transformation.

Conversely, the modern approach gives this answer: "By giving unconditional affirmation to one another without regard for truth." However, this approach is mere sentimentality, thus lacking any power for transformation.

Isn't there a better way? How are we to BIBLICALLY address sin in each other's lives?

In this session, we will explore the what the Bible's teaches about speaking the truth in love by building up one another.

Read

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another... **29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Eph 4:25, 29

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Eph 4:15-16

Study

1. Heb 10:25 famously tells us that we are to “encourage one another”. What comes to mind when you think of that phrase?

2. According to verse 25, we are to speak the truth with our neighbours in light of “having put away falsehood”. How does this verse relate truth-speaking community with personal growth in “true righteousness” (read verses 22-24)?

3. According to verse 29, what are some marks of biblically speaking the truth in love with one another?

4. Verse 25 describes the WHAT (“speak the truth”), while verse 29 describes the HOW (“building up...give grace”). How is the balance of these truths so different from the traditional and modern approaches described in the introduction?

5. Verse 15 summarizes verses 25-26 as “speaking the truth in love”. According to verse 15-16, what happens when a church begins to speak the truth in love?

Respond

6. Verse 25 says that speaking the truth to one another is crucial for personal growth in righteousness. Do you feel the importance of truth-telling community? Why or why not?

7. Which of the mark given in verse 29 are you most prone to struggle to abide by? Corrupting talk? Talk that builds up? Talk that fits the occasion? How can you begin to make changes in this area?

8. According to verses 15-16, "speaking the truth in love" leads to immense community flourishing. Do you see the power of this truth? What stops you from seeing it? How can your small group apply this powerful truth together?

9. John 1:14 speaks about Jesus, saying, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." In what way is Jesus Christ the ultimate author of speaking the truth in love?

Christ told us the ugly truth about us honestly, while still beautifully loving and building us up completely. How would your building up of one another change if you were truly struck by this truth?

Pray

Father, thank you for giving me one family and one body in this church. It is an amazing reality to get family in your kingdom. Lord, please forgive me for often forgetting my stake and responsibility to speak the truth in love to my brothers and sisters in Christ. Forgive me for leaving them in danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of their sin (Heb 3:13). Lord, give me a deep commitment to my fellow brothers and sisters.

Father, forgive me when I am not balanced. On one hand, forgive me when I am truthful, but not gracious. That is just cruel brutality. On the other hand, forgive me when I am gracious, but not truthful. That is just mushy sentimentality. Lord, guard me from either extreme.

Father, I thank you that Jesus Christ was ultimately truthful with me. You showed me the truth about how bad my sin really was: the cost was Jesus' life on the cross! Lord, forgive me when I forget how sinful I am without Christ. Please make me aware of this truth. Thank you for not sugarcoating how bad I was. You were humbly truthful with us; Make us humbly truthful with one another.

Father, I praise you that even though Christ knew me truthfully, Christ still died for me and rebuilt me completely. Lord, forgive me for often forgetting this truth and the joy of my salvation. Please make me aware of such joyous truth. You loved me gently, built me up completely and gave grace freely even though you knew the ugly truth of my sin. Lord, help me do the same with others.

SESSION 5

Sin divides:

FORGIVE one another

Introduction

In the previous 2 sessions, we explored two truths. Firstly, sin hardens our hearts. Therefore, we must exhort one another. Secondly, exhortation by merely speaking the truth is not enough. Because sin is destructive, unfettered truth is cruel. Therefore, we must build up one another by speaking the truth in love.

While speaking the truth in love is our ultimate goal, we often fall short of that goal. Due to the presence of remaining sin in all of us, we are all prone to letting the destructive nature of sin get the better of us. When sin breaks out in our personal lives, it destroys our peace and joy. However, when sin breaks out in our community lives, it destroys our relationships – with friends, family, spouses and neighbours.

When we find ourselves in this all-too-common situation, what are we to do? What if destructive sin has already divided a relationship? What if the damage is already done?

In this session, we will dig into the treasure of God's word to find the key to healing our divided relationships: Gospel Forgiveness.

Read

32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Eph 4:32

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Mt 18:21–35

Study

Eph 4:32 calls us to “forgive one another, *as God in Christ forgave you.*” Without this last phrase, we would not know the manner and the measure by which we are called to forgive one another. If this last phrase was absent, we could come up with our own standards of forgiveness. However, God’s word gives us an objective standard – We are to forgive *as God in Christ forgave us.*

As such, this command can only be obeyed if we understand how God forgave us in Christ. This is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18:21-35. In fact, this story starts with Peter asking the same question: How should we forgive? What standard of forgiveness should we abide by?

Jesus’ reply in Matt 18:23-35 is simply stunning.

1. Read Matt 18:23-25. Taking into consideration the size of the servant’s debt (ten thousand talents was equal to 200 000 years of salary), how bad was the servant’s situation? How would you have felt if you were in his shoes?

2. Read Matt 18:26. Do you find the servant’s response to be somewhat strange, especially considering the size of his debt? What do you think he was failing to see?

3. Read Matt 18:27. Do you find the master’s forgiveness of the debt to be beautiful? Why or why not? If you were the servant, how would you respond to this act of grace?

4. Read Matt 18:28-31. Given the small relative debt of the second servant (100 denarii was equal to just over 3 months of salary), why is the servant's reaction in v28 and v30 so shocking and "distressing" (v31)?

Matt 18:32-34 brings the story to a fitting resolution – the king acts justly. In these verses, the ultimate climax comes in v33 when the king pointedly charges the first servant, "*And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?*". When we read this verse, it is almost impossible to miss the connection to Eph 4:32 – "*forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*" It was ludicrous for the servant to experience such epic forgiveness from the king and not forgive others. Similarly, it is ludicrous for us to experience such cosmic forgiveness from God in Christ and not forgive others. In fact, the whole parable gives us a picture of how much we were truly forgiven.

Respond

5. We see a clear parallel between the unpayable debt that the king forgave and the cosmic sin-debt that God in Christ forgave. When you think of the size of your sin-debt to God, what comes to mind?

6. TRUTH: The cost of your sin-debt is the very life of the son of God. The cross is the "invoice" of your sin-debt paid by Jesus Christ.

How does that truth move you to joy and gratitude? How does it humble you?

7. In this parable, Jesus likens forgiving sin (v21) to forgiving debt (v27). This is an apt comparison. When we are sinned against, we feel like the other person "owes" us. As such, like the unforgiving

servant, we often “seize” and “choke” those who have a sin debt against us and demand that they pay the debt; perhaps by us hurting and yelling at them or perhaps by making grovel enough to pay their debt. Have you ever or are you currently bitter towards anyone? Have you or are you demanding a sin-debt to be paid by the other person? What is that like?

TRUTH: We deserved to be seized and choked until our sin-debt was be repaid. Instead, Jesus was seized for us and was a ransom for our sin-debt. God canceled “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

How does this truth make you more merciful?

We can only succeed in forgiving one another when we truly see how much we have been forgiven. As a small group, discuss how you can frequently point each other to the gospel forgiveness, so that you may forgive one another in your small group *as God in Christ forgave you*.

Pray

Father, we praise you that you have forgiven us an unpayable debt. Lord Jesus, thank you for absorbing the full debt of our sin at the cross. Your cross shows us the price of our sin and the depth of your love. This humbles us and amazes us all at the same time. Lord, would you give us eyes to always see clearly how much you forgave us? Lord, would you cause resultant joy to erupt in our hearts?

Forgive us when we “seize” and “choke” one another demanding that they pay the debt they owe. Forgive us for often forgetting your mercy so quickly. Lord, help us to view our sin-debt as enormous, so that we can view others’ sin-debt as tiny. Lord, remind us of your great mercy, that we can have mercy on others. Help us to forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave us.

SESSION 6

**Christ first loved us:
LOVE one another**

Introduction

In sessions 3-5, we explored the problem that disrupts and destroys Christian community: sin. Sin is highly deceptive, destructive and divisive. As such, we are called to exhort, build up and forgive one another. But obeying all of those commands can often seem like such a tall order especially in the face of hurtful sin. As such, it's natural to ask: How can I possibly to all of it? Where is the power to do this?

In this session, we will learn that the power to preserve Christian community comes from a deep awareness of Christ's radical love for you leading to radical love for others.

Knowing the God of love makes us a people of love.

Read

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us...

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 John 4:7-12, 19-21

Study

1. How does our culture typically define love for others? Is love more of a feeling or more of an action? From past experience, how do Christian communities typically define love? Do you think these characterizations are adequate? Why?

2. According to verses 7-8, how does our love for others relate to knowing God? What do these verses teach us about God's relationship with love? What is at stake when we don't love others?

3. The truth that "God is love" can often be abstract. However, God's love is not abstract; it was "made manifest" (v9). According to verse 9, how did God's love become real to us? How does God's real love in Christ change our real lives?

4. How does verse 10 define what love is? Verse 10 adds to verse 9 by saying that Christ is the "propitiation for our sins." What does that mean?

5. Verse 20 reads, 'If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar;' What reasoning does verses 11-12 and 19-21 give for such a harsh indictment?

Respond

6. In what ways do you see yourself defining love the way our culture (or past experiences) does? What is the danger in this?

7. According to verses 7-8, because God is both the author and embodiment of love, the state of our love for others is telling of whether we know God or not.

HEART CHECK: Do you see loving others to be a natural byproduct of knowing God? How are you doing at loving others? Do you sometimes see loving others as separate from knowing God? Are your personal and private lives too separate?

8. According to verse 9, God's love is never left as a sentimental feeling; God's love makes itself alive and real. Jesus Christ is God's love made real. Jesus Christ is the expression of God's "down-to-earth" love. Is God's love for you just an abstract concept? How so? How can the truth of Jesus' coming make God's love more real, tangible and down-to-earth in your life?

9. According to verse 10, God's love is not only made real in Christ's life; God's love is made real in Christ's death. Verse 10 says that love doesn't start with our actions; It starts with God's actions: God sent Jesus to absorb the wrath of God ("propitiation") in our place ("for our sins"). Is this truth real and alive for you? If this truth were alive and real, how this make us more sacrificial in our love for others?

This passage has a clear message: We must love one another. However, our love for the real people around us can only happen when we truly understand that God himself, the author and embodiment of love, made love real. Jesus is God's love made real. Jesus lived a sinless life in the flesh and died a sinner's death in the flesh. And it was all done for us. What more do we need to make God's love real to our hearts? If God's real love is made real to our hearts, we will grow into loving real people.

Pray

Father, thank you that you are a God of love. Love comes from you and you are love. we praise you that you are a God of love and not cruelty. Thank you that love is who you are.

Lord, we recognize that we need to love one another, but we often fall so short. Please forgive us for times when we are simply cruel and thoughtless toward one another. Forgive us when we say, "I love God" or "God loves me", but it doesn't change how we love others. Forgive us for being "liars" (v20). Forgive us for forgetting the reality of Christ's life and death.

Jesus Christ, you are love made real. Help me to remember that. Please make Jesus's life and death so real to my heart. I pray that that would move my love beyond mere sentiment; that it would make my love real and active towards other people. Please make the love of Jesus Christ real to our small group, that we may love each other radically.

SESSION 7

**Christ humbled himself:
SUBMIT TO one another**

Introduction

In the previous session, we explored that love for one another is a clear mark that we know God, the author and embodiment of love. Furthermore, this love was made real to us in his. Jesus Christ was love made real.

However, this raises the question, what is the hallmark of this love? What is the defining feature of God's love for us expressed in the person of Jesus Christ?

In this session, we will learn that the hallmark of Christ's love is this: his ground-breaking humility. We will see that his humility completely transforms the way in which we relate to one another. His humility drives us to not merely be courteous to one another, but to submit to one another altogether.

Read

³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Phil 2:3-11

Study

1. How would our culture describe humility? Do you think it is an accurate description?

2. According to verse 3, how are we called to change how we *regard* others? According to verse 4, how are we called to change how we *act towards* others? Do you find this to be a radical call? Why or why not?

3. Verse 5 exhorts us to have a particular “mind” or mindset. Why do you think a completely new way of thinking is necessary to obey verses 3-4?

4. Verses 5-11 has been historically called “The Christ Hymn”. It is a poetic, yet robust expression of the stages of Christ’s work: His *humiliation* and *exaltation*. Let’s explore each of these stages:

- a. **Humiliation.**

Verse 6-7 describe Christ’s first stage of humiliation:

Incarnation. How is it described? What is striking to you?

Verse 8 describes Christ’s final stage of humiliation:

Crucifixion. How is it described? What is striking to you?

b. **Exaltation.**

How do verses 9-11 describe Christ's exaltation? What is striking to you?

Respond

10. Verses 3-4 call for radical change in how we regard and act toward others. Why is this call often so hard for us to obey?

11. Take a moment to reflect: Do you have the mindset referred to in verses 3-5? In what ways is your mindset too self-oriented or self-absorbed? How does this impact your day to day life?

12. Verse 5 says that the mindset of humility is already ours "in Christ Jesus". Verses 6-11 then proceeds to lay out how the work of Christ is both the blueprint and key to getting this mindset.

a. How does the reality of Christ's incarnation (verses 6-7), change the way we view "emptying" ourselves or taking the role of a "servant" to others?

b. How does the reality of Christ's crucifixion (verses 8), change the way we view humbly sacrificing for others?

- c. How does the reality of Christ's exaltation (verses 9), change the way we view the level of prestige and honour associated with sacrificially loving others?

13. Eph 5:21 exhorts us to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Are you revering Christ well, savouring his humiliation and exaltation? Where do you need to grow in this regard?

How can you see your life increasing in both reverence of Christ and submission to others?

Pray

Father, we praise you that you are the God who emptied yourself, took the form of a servant and humbled yourself to the point of death on a cross. Amazing love. How can it be that thou my God, shouldst die for me?

Lord, please forgive me when I forget this ground-breaking reality. If you really emptied, humbled and lowered yourself for me, I am now richly free to empty, humble and lower myself for others. Forgive me for my self-absorption and my gospel forgetfulness.

Please magnify the person and work of Jesus Christ in my life, that I may revere Christ and submit to one another as a result.