

Authentically Connected to our Marketplaces

1 John 4:7-21

We are not called to live in isolation. We are called to live authentically connected with God, other believers, and those in our marketplace. Once we understand that authentic community, intimacy, relationship and connection is what we have been offered through Christ, it empowers us to offer it to others outside of the Christian community in demonstrating God's love and welcome to them, flaws and all.

Key Readings: 1 John 4:7-21, John 1:1-14, 1 Cor 9:19-23, Matthew 25:31-46, Genesis 12:1-3

Before we get started why don't you take a moment to write down the different 'marketplaces' or communities/relationships you have with people outside of the Christian community. It is helpful to identify the areas where God has already placed you in order to show His love and welcome to others.

Marketplaces might be areas where you work, the school your kids go to, the local coffee shop or supermarket. The gym, the local park, university, school. Anyplace where you can seek to live like Jesus in this world could be considered a marketplace. The opportunities are endless!

Q. What stops us from cultivating an authentic connection in our different marketplaces?

In Sunday's sermon there were two key areas in our lives where our love for others can be derailed. As a community why don't you discuss other factors that might contribute to stopping us from building deeper connections.

Read 1 John 4:7-21 and John 1:1-14 together.

Q. What do you notice about the way God showed His love to us?

God showed us his unconditional love by sending Jesus to come and made his home in the world so that we would know God's love, and testify it to the world. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see him time and time again engage in deep relationships with people. He shared stories, listen to people, celebrate with them, share meals and more importantly he dwelt among the sinners. He dwelt among our brokenness and our failures. He did this not with an agenda or with a condition that we would get our act together first; he came to us first while we were sinners.

God's purpose for us is not to stand in JUDGEMENT over the world

Our judgments interfere with many of our relationships. They give us a sense of righteousness, but really all that is happening is that we are not getting what we want from the other person or they are not doing what we think is best for them.

God calls us to love others, because he first loved us. The act of loving someone is going beyond our personal "likes and dislikes" or our personal "beliefs and convictions" and surrendering our judgments, so we can freely and sacrificially share our love with another person and celebrate the image of God in them, not their failings.

As a community you might like to share with each other how you have seen judgement effect relationships. This gives are areas where we can continue to be praying for and supporting each other as we wrestle with what it looks like to sacrificially love those who don't live the same way we do, nor believe the same things we believe.

The second area that can stop us from reaching out in love to our marketplace is *fear*. Before we look at the passage together, why don't you take a moment to be honest before the Lord and write down the different "what if's" or "but's".

"WHAT IF this happens?"

"I know I need to love more BUT..."

If you feel comfortable share these reflections with your community. As we share the things we fear or are worried about, sharing it in love with one another brings God's light and love into a dark place.

God's purpose for us is not to stand in FEAR of the world

Read 1 John 4:17-21 together.

Q. What do you notice about the contrasts John makes?

If we truly believe that God's sacrifice is enough to free us from God's judgement then what in the world is there to fear? In verse 18 John explains why love produces confidence. If we are going to authentically connect with our marketplace then our fear of JUDGEMENT should be replaced by LOVING OTHERS.

The challenge we can read from John's letter suggests that if we are living a lifestyle of hate, meanness or self-centeredness, then we are harbouring something in the place that love was meant to occupy. Just as he said that fear and love cannot coexist, so hate and love cannot coexist. You can't say "I love God" and "I hate so-and-so" or "I never want to have to speak to so-and-so".

Loving others is a natural outflow of how you have been loved by God first. This was God's purpose for us from the very beginning.

Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 22:17-18 together.

This is God's promise to Abraham. As you reflect on the implications of what it is to be "blessed to be a blessing". What does this now means for us?

From the very formation of God's people, Abraham was called so that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you". God never intended to call a special people to himself so they can revel in how special they are. It was always for the purposes of being a light to the nations.

God's purpose for us is to reach out in LOVE to the world.

God's plan was always for us to be so fulfilled and complete in our relationship with the triune God that out of this over flow we stand connected through Christ and be like Jesus in this world, demonstrating God's love as we live out the purpose to be "others focused".

1 John 4:14 – In this world we are like Jesus.

For further discussion **read Matthew 25:31-46**. This parable reminds us that we will be called to account for our actions, and the way we served and loved those in need. We are not called to pull away from the world, but to draw near and demonstrate God's love to our world.

Q. What is God saying to you as you read this passage? And how will you respond in obedience?

Here are three practices we can adopt to begin cultivating relationships with our marketplaces:

1. Find an accountability partner.

If we are truly going to live a lifestyle of love, then we have to do some major self-reflection and ask, *where is judgement dwelling in my life. Do I judge certain people? Do I display disdain and dislike in my tone of voice or actions?*

You can write this in a prayer journal, but it's one thing to write it down, it takes courage to share with your accountability partner/life group. In doing so we give permission to the people we trust to be holding each other to account for what we do and say.

2. Engage where there is fear.

So often we fear what we don't know. It is easy to let fear isolate ourselves. And the more we separate ourselves from what is driving this fear the bigger it feels. Instead, let's take steps together to engage where there is fear. As a group discuss simple ways this could be done. It could be a simple phone call, a coffee catch up or inviting them into your community.

3. Demonstrate God's sacrificial love.

Could you imagine the impact it would have in our neighbourhoods if each community looked to demonstrate God's love to those around them? Could you imagine the witness to the Gospel that could be. This week seek to demonstrate God's sacrificial, unconditional love.

When someone tells you they have an upcoming job interview, a test, or a doctor appointment, mark it on your calendar. Follow up on the big day with a note of encouragement to let them know you are praying for them, or ask them how it went afterward. Better yet, do both!

Go make a batch of cookies for the new family that just moved in on your street
Practice random acts of kindness.

Take your neighbour's bins out for them.

Mow their lawn "just because."

The list could go on and on!

Seek to demonstrate God's sacrificial, unconditional love to someone throughout this week. Because if we aren't making this world a better place...if we aren't seeking to be others focused...then what are we even doing here?