***Session 5*** ***Loving Others in the Love of God (Jn. 15:12)***

1. the priority of love
	1. Review: God is love (1 John 4:16). The very being of God is wholehearted love. Wholehearted love is of first importance in God’s personality and in all relationships in His kingdom.
	The love burning in God’s heart has at least five distinct expressions that are deeply interrelated.
	1. ***God’s love for God***: Each person in the Trinity intensely loves the others with all their heart.
	2. ***God’s love for His people***: He loves His people with all of His heart, mind, and strength. He
	 loves the redeemed with the same intensity that He loves within the fellowship of the Trinity.
	3. ***Our love for God***: God’s very own love is imparted to His people by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5).
	4. ***Our love for ourselves***: We love ourselves in God’s love and for God’s sake. .
	5. ***Our love for others***: We love others in the overflow of experiencing God’s love (1 John 4:19).

*I am continuing on a series that I am calling* ***Abiding in Love****. I am using the phrase in John* ***15:9*** *where Jesus calls us to abide in love. Here’s a quick review from the last four sessions that the premise of the kingdom is the fact that God is love.*

*When I say, “God is love,” I like to add the phrase* ***wholehearted****. He is wholehearted love. The only way that God loves in the context of His family is with all of His heart. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit, and the Father loves His children with all of His heart, all of His strength, all of His mind. That is a dynamic concept we will be thinking on for all the ages.*

*Wholehearted love is not just the only way that God loves in the context of His family, but it is also the most important attribute in His personality. In all of His kingdom relationships, loving with all the heart is primary.*

*I have five distinct expressions of the way God's love is expressed that we have been covering week by week. We are going to stay on this for some sessions even in the future.*

*Number one, the source and the model of this love is the way that God loves God—the way the Father loves the Son. He loves Jesus with all of His strength and all of His might, but it does not stop there. God the Father, Son, and Spirit love us in the way They love each other. It does not stop there. They inspire that kind of love* ***in*** *us* ***back*** *to them so that we would love God with all of our heart. The first commandment to love God with all of our heart does not start with us; it starts in a reality long before us, in the fellowship of the Godhead.*

*It goes on to loving ourselves, and this is so important. Jesus said you should love your neighbor as yourself. One of the reasons we do not love our neighbor well is due to the emotional traffic we have because we do not see who we are in God's sight, and we do not love who God has made us in the grace of God.*

*Today we are going to focus on this last expression just a little bit because it is a vast subject. I am going to barely introduce the subject. It is this fifth expression of loving one another in the overflow of the way that God loves us.*

* 1. God loves us with the same intensity that God loves God (Jn. 15:9; 17:23). To abide in love is to continually live in it. The intense love God has for us is expressed in our love to others. Our love for others is the measure of our love for Jesus.

9“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love…12This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (Jn. 15:9-12)

*Jesus put two ideas together in verse 9, which is the premise of this series—really the premise of the whole way the kingdom operates—Jesus said in John 15:9, and I paraphrase, “In the same intensity that the Father loves Me, that is the way I love you.*

*What a remarkable statement, John 15:9! Jesus said, “In the same way the Father loves Me—that is the quality and the intensity of how I love you.” Then He gives the phrase that I am making the title of this series, “Abide in this love.” Focus on it, experience it, and do not just experience it from God, express it to others as well. Take initiative with this love and walk it out.*

*In John 15:12, Jesus gives us a practical but very necessary response that He wants us to have to the way God loves us. He says, “So you are moved by the way that I love you. Here is what I want you to do. I want you to be a vessel of My glory, a joint of supply in My body to express this same quality of love to other people.” He says in John 15:12, “I want you to express the way I love you. I want you to love other people that way.” (paraphrased) Here is the reason—because God loves those people in the same way that He loves us, which is the same way He loves Jesus.*

*The Father is saying, “I have such an investment in those people. I have such a passion for them that I am ordaining the members of the Body of Christ to be My joints of supply to express that love to those other people in the Body of Christ.”*

*The reason I am saying this is that when some folks hear about the mandate of the kingdom to love, they automatically hear it through the paradigm of a spirit of entitlement. When they hear that the Body of Christ is called to love each other, they instantly think, “How come people do not pursue me and love me and value me in the way they are supposed to?” That is a very natural response, but what I am saying is that I want to take this in a different direction.*

*Instead of a spirit of entitlement, of “how come I do not get treated that way,” I am taking it in a different direction—to a spirit of empowerment. The Lord is saying, “I want you to take the initiative to supply that to somebody else SO THAT they have a sense of belonging to My kingdom.” The Lord will take care of you in the process. Our concern is to be focused on expressing this love to others in our loyalty for having received it from the Lord Himself. We are grateful that in our brokenness He is that committed to us.*

*The Lord says, “Okay, if you are grateful for the way I have loved you and pursued you and for how much you matter to Me when you did not deserve it, then in your loyalty to Me, I want you to go to people I love and am invested in. I want you to show that love to them in My name because I love them that much.”*

*Now the focus is not just to love people that are exactly like us, who have the same tastes and desires and similar type of personality. Our tendency as humans is to find a couple of cool people who like what we like, and we bond around liking the same kind of entertainments, hobbies, and things. There is nothing actually wrong with that, but Jesus is calling us to something far beyond that. We do not want to limit our vision of the second commandment to “love one another” to loving people that we like being with. He is says, “No, love all the people I am invested in.”*

*“It is not just the people you like,” the Father is saying. “It is the guy out there who nobody values, and nobody pursues, but I value them, and I pursue them, and I want you to be the vessel that does it for me. It does not matter if you feel drawn to them because I feel drawn to them.”*

*I have had people over the years say, “Well, I do not really connect with them.” But the Father connects with them. He wants us to express that connection to them and give them a sense and a place of connection so they can receive that love, value, and pursuit that the Father has for them.*

*He is talking about people in whom you invest and give to, who cannot enrich your profile. They cannot enrich your resource base at all, but you love them simply out of loyalty because the Father loves them, and you want to show your loyalty to the Father.*

* 1. The Father had a deep desire to have a family that experiences and shares His love with one another. He fashioned the human heart to long for intimacy with Him and others. He created us with a desire to know and be known—to have a sense of belonging. So much of our life goes unnoticed and misunderstood by others. We were not created to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Thoreau said, *“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.”*

18And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone…” (Gen. 2:18)

*The Father had a deep desire to have a family. This is where this whole thing begins, back in the desire, that burning desire, in the Father’s heart even before the foundation of the world. He desired to have a family. Well, He was already dwelling in a family—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He was Father long before the creation of the world. He did not become Father when Jesus became a Man. He was the Father within the context of the Trinity in ages past.*

*He had a family, but He wanted to extend that family. He wanted a family of human beings, a vast family that would participate in the joy of the way they love within the Godhead. A family that would receive it, and they would express it and dwell together in joy. This is part of the* ***why*** *behind the* ***what****. What God did—He created. What God did—He redeemed.*

*Why did God create? Why did He redeem? The* ***why*** *is that He is a Father who desires a family; that is one of the whys. There are several whys, if I were to answer that question in a full way.*

*Now it is interesting, or significant even more than interesting, that the name Jesus emphasized most and the attribute that Jesus emphasized most concerning the transcendent God of Israel was the fact that He is Father. Jesus did not say to pray, “Our transcendent God who art in heaven.” He said, “Our Father who art in heaven.” Jesus is the One who revealed the relational dimension of God’s heart in a way far beyond the Old Testament prophets. He said the transcendent God is, in fact, a Father. That is not just a symbolic name. That is the way He thinks. That is the way He feels. That is the nature of His heart. He is a Father, He acts like a Father, and He feels—has emotions—like a Father. Jesus came to reveal that the transcendent God of Israel was, in fact, this deeply relational Being who wanted that relationship to spread out and include many others.*

*He cares about the other members in the Body, His family, about whom we do not naturally care or we do not naturally have a connection. He is deeply connected to them, and He has a plan for them. The good news is that He has a plan for them, and you are a part of that plan of pursuing and valuing and pulling them in closer to the Father's heart.*

*I am a father, and I tell you there are few things that I enjoy more in life than when my sons love one another. They are both in their early thirties, and over the years I have had such joy watching them love each other. I mean, I want them to love God. I want them to love me and Mom. I want them to love, but when they love each other, oh I love that! When they love each other, and I have seen so many snapshots of that over the last thirty plus years. So in a very small way I look up to heaven and say, “Father, I understand a little bit how You feel when we pursue and invest and and go after other people whom You feel that way about.”*

*God fashioned the human heart, and He created the human heart with a deep desire to know and be known. He created and fashioned us with a desire to have a sense of belonging to other human beings, not just belonging to God in an individual sense. That is of the highest importance, but He created us with a sense of this need of belonging to one another, because remember, it is the Father who designed the creation.*

*He put right into our spirit, our DNA—our emotional and spiritual DNA—this longing to connect with one another. Now the problem is that though we are created that way, because sin entered into the picture, most people, even believers, live their life unnoticed, un-pursued, uncelebrated, and misunderstood. God created us to be pursued, to be known, to be celebrated, to be partnered with, but most people live without that original ideal God had when He created them.*

*Henry David Thoreau, a well-known author and poet in America's history about 1840's, 50's, and 60's, described this dilemma in a very clear way. I just love this quote. I have referenced it over the years. He said most men lead lives of quiet desperation. I mean what a sentence.*

*His observation is that most men—the powerful men of the earth, the weak men of the earth, the unnoticed men of the earth—most men live lives of quiet desperation. They feel lonely, they feel like a failure, and they feel inadequate to the thing that is before them, even if they are very powerful and famous people.*

*They still feel lonely, they feel desperate, and they feel inadequate to what is before them. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “Alas for those that never sing, but die with all their music in them.” That is, they go to their grave with the song still in them—meaning the dream of their heart—and they go to their grave with nobody celebrating the dream that was in their heart all their days. Well, the Father wants to correct that. He has a plan that is exactly opposite of where man finds himself naturally.*

*Notice it was God's observation in Genesis 2. This is a divine insight. He said that it is not good for man to be alone. Now this means much more than the context of marriage that was given there. This is an observation, a divine observation, about the design of the human spirit. It is not good that we are disconnected, even horizontally. We need to be connected vertically with the Lord, but being connected vertically with the Lord is not enough. This was before Adam sinned. This is not the fruit of Adam's sin. He is a needy man, and he needs people.*

*Before there was any sin, even in Adam’s initial righteousness and perfection, God said, “Adam, I designed you to need other human beings. It is not because you are fallen. It is because I am a Father, and I built you that way. I designed you that way.” When Adam and Eve fell into sin, that longing did not go away. It was tainted. It was obscured. It was made more difficult to fulfill, but still that longing is in us.*

*I have heard people, well-meaning people, say over the years, “I just need the Lord, and that is enough.” Well, that is not a biblical statement; it is not enough. You actually need* ***more*** *than the Lord. It is like “Uh, I cannot believe you said that.” Yes, that is Bible.*

*God is a Father with a family. He built and designed you to function in a family. Though not everyone has a nuclear family they can function in because they are separated for one reason or another, God has designed the local church and the Body of Christ in the earth to be that family in a spiritual way, I do not mean as a replacement of the natural family, because our natural family is our first assignment and our first priority in our lives.*

*It is not enough to connect with just the Lord, because there is a lot that God will give me, but He put it in your mouth and in your heart, and I get it from God when I receive it from you. There is another part of God’s heart that I only get when I give to you. So if it is just the Lord, and I, I do not receive God’s heart from you. There are many things I do not get from the Lord if I do not give them. It is in the giving to you that my own heart expands.*

*We discover Him in this dynamic pursuit of relationships in the family of God, and I am not saying that we do not go outside the family of God because we have our joy is to bring others into the family. Right now I am talking about loving one another within the kingdom community. In no way am I minimizing the glory and the mandate to reach outside of the kingdom community as well.*

* 1. We are to live life mutually sharing joy and sorrows with others. Part of God’s answer to this longing is to raise up spiritual families committed to the first and second commandments.

*The Father has a plan. He says, “I am going to reverse this whole thing, this loneliness that man lives in.” God’s answer to this longing is to raise up spiritual families that are committed to the first and second commandment.*

*Now I want to make the point again that I made earlier. We are committed to the first and second commandment, meaning we take the initiative ourselves to walk in those two great commandments. We are not waiting for somebody to show the second commandment to love us, but we are actually committed to be the one to take the initiative to show it to others.*

*Again, I do not want to stir up a spirit of entitlement—there is so much of that already. A spirit of entitlement. I have been around the kingdom of God all over the earth, and it is the same. It is the same heartache. I have been around, and people say, “Nobody has pursued me; nobody has valued me.” The Word of God takes a very different approach. It does not stir up or inspire our entitlement. Rather, it empowers us to take the initiative to be that joint of supply to others.*

*I have good news for you. The Lord has a plan so that everybody could walk out this sense of belonging. Everybody could have this affirmation of their value and destiny and have the glory of who they are spoken to them, not just by the Lord directly, but through the Lord’s people, through the lips of other people. One child said, “I need God with skin on.” We need God with skin on. We need to hear the Word of the Lord through another person—God with skin.”*

* 1. Jesus is committed to blessing kingdom communities of believers called the local church.

18“…I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt 16:18–19)

*Matthew 16 is one of the great prophecies of Jesus. This is a dynamic prophecy. He says, “I will build My church.” That started 2,000 years ago, but here is the prophecy—it goes beyond just an intention to build. He says, in essence, “Let me tell you the measure to which I am going to take My commitment to My church.” He says that the gates of Hades will not prevail against this spiritual family. He has spiritual families all over the earth called local churches. Now what Jesus is prophesying here that the gates of Hades—Hades is hell, the gates of hell—for the word* ***gates*** *you can put the use the word the* ***authority*** *of hell.*

*The idea is He is going to raise up a Church in which demonic depression is completely driven out of it. Can you imagine companies of people all over the earth in which none of their members are being oppressed by the devil, not the people or their families, none of them? The gates of hell are completely driven out of the lifestyle of the people—we’re talking about there is no demonic oppression in their life. Now that is such a glorious thing! It is 2,000 years later, and we are still waiting to see that walked out in flesh-and-blood life.*

*I want to assure you that, before the Lord returns, He will have a glorious Church across the whole earth. In this glorious Church they will love one another the way that Jesus loves them, and there will not be demonic oppression in the midst of the members of the Body of Christ. He will have an expression of His family in every tribe and tongue and every place on the earth before Jesus returns.*

*In our own city there are a 1,000 congregations—there is more than that, but that is just a kind of a round number—there are a 1,000 spiritual families plus more that make up the larger family of God in our city. He says, “I am going to build a Church, and the gates of hell—the oppression of Satan—will not prevail in their midst.”*

*Then, in Matthew 16:19,**He tells us how He is going to do this. One of the key points—He says, “I am going to give you the keys of the kingdom”—that is the authority in prayer right here. He says that you are going to have the ability to bind the demonic works, and then you are going to have the authority to loose the blessing and the favor of God or the activity of the Holy Spirit onto other people. Now people get excited by this binding of the negative and loosing of the positive. They say, “Wow, this is so exciting!” They get excited about a picture of the Church in such victory where there is no demonic oppression. But here is the thing that is often overlooked, that this promise of power that excites us is deeply connected to the first phrase of Matthew 16:18.*

*It is connected to His people dwelling together as the local church. It is not a promise of power separated from the family functioning together. Again, it is not just everybody having a few friends; it is bigger than that. It is that among everybody who names the name of Jesus the Lord has stirred up the stronger members to go pursue the weaker members to show them the value they have to the Father.*

*This is a startling reality to the unbelieving community. A number of times Jesus said when the unbelievers see you do this—that you are pursuing those who cannot give anything back to you in the natural; you are valuing them, you are pursuing them, they can not enhance your profile, they can not enhance your resource base, they can not do anything for you in the natural, but you so value them, because you see how the Father values you and how the Father values them — the unbelievers conclude that the God of Jesus must be this way because He has inspired so many people to do this where the strongest pursue the weakest.*

*It is not an issue of the coolest pursuing the coolest. It is not the rich and the famous and the beautiful hanging out with the rich and the famous and the beautiful, but the stronger ones pursuing the weaker ones who are all by themselves in this deep desperation of loneliness, though they have received the salvation of God.*

*The Father says, “I promised you, you belong. But that promise can not come to pass if the stronger ones are not stirred up to be the vessels, the joints of My supply.” So many people in the Body of Christ dwell in loneliness, in their weakness, and their brokenness, and they conclude God is not real.*

*They say, “Well, you know, I have been in the kingdom for years. Maybe You are not real.”*

*The Lord is saying, “I am trying to stir the strong ones to be that joint of supply to you.”*

*Beloved, it is our time, and it is an hour in our life where we are saying, “Yes, Lord, we want to be that joint of supply to others. We are not that strong, but with whatever we have, we will do that under Your leadership.”*

* 1. The NT community resulted from people pursuing a common vision and values together. There are corporate and individual dimensions to functioning in God’s family. No amount of time in prayer, Bible study, or ministry substitutes for a believer’s committed involvement in a church. Many embrace a “churchless Christianity” which encourages an isolated “anything goes” life.

25…not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:25)

1A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment.

(Prov. 18:1)

*Now the type of Church that manifests the fullness of power—right now there are dimensions of power here and there even without the Church functioning as a spiritual family—but the fullness of power is what I am talking about. I do not want a little bit of deliverance from oppression. I want to see the day where, in the entire spiritual family I am a part of, every one is free from demonic oppression; that is a vision! Beloved, it is going to happen all over the world in every tribe and tongue before Jesus returns. There is going to be an acceleration of pressure, an acceleration of the glory of God, an acceleration of a few other things, and it is going to end up with a Church filled with glory, prepared as a Bride, before the Lord returns at His second coming.*

*Well, the question we are asking is, how does this happen? We want to walk in that power. We want to be loyal to You, Jesus, and we want to go after the people that You are invested in, for whom You care, even if we are not that connected to them. We want to show our love for You and our gratitude for the way You love us by being that joint of supply to them. We want to see the fullness of power.*

*The key is that this kind of New Testament community is the result of people that have a common vision and common values, and that vision and those values are rooted in the written Word of God, meaning they are not values that we pull out of the culture. They are not secular values. We have values that are clearly enunciated in the Word of God.*

*There is a corporate dimension to being the people of God. Yes, we have that individual connection where we want to grow and grow and grow in understanding that “He loves me the way the Father loves Him.” Then there is the gathering of twos and threes. So much of the work of the kingdom happens in twos and threes. There are the gatherings of the tens and twenties, and so much happens in that regard as well. But there is a picture of the Father's heart that He wants to show every single city where His Church dwells. He wants to use that collective group of people to give a picture of what the Father's heart is like, so the unbelievers see the Church functioning, and they get a glimpse that the God of Israel is actually a God with a Father’s heart. They conclude it by looking at the Church.*

*Beloved, you can be the most dedicated man or woman of God, even the most dedicated man or woman of God with the power of God second to no one on the earth, but there is a bigger picture of God that you cannot give, even in your radical dedication and total power in the anointing.*

*There is a picture that God wants to give in our context, south Kansas City, that He can only show when spiritual families dwell together, and we express the Father's heart. There is a view of God that can only be seen as we do that together. I am talking about congregations all over the south Kansas City area.*

*We want to be this example so that the unsaved look and ask, “What kind of people are they? They value weak and broken people who should be irritating them. They value weak and broken people who cannot give them anything in the natural. What kind of God are they serving? How are they energized in this patient tenderness towards people they should be writing off, because I would have written that guy off a long time ago!”*

*We are being motivated by the God who loves us the way that God loves God and who has invested in us and in those other people who might bother or trouble us and to whom we are not drawn, but God is drawn to them. There is no amount of prayer and Bible study, there is no amount of ministry that, from a biblical point of view, substitutes for an integral connection to the local church because that is what enhances the opportunity for the most people in our midst to have that sense of belonging.*

*Again, a lot of folks think, “Well, what is in it for me?”*

*There actually is a lot in it for us as we give to others, but there is a bigger question. The Lord says, “I am using you because I have an investment in them, and they will not understand that if you do not obey Me in this regard. Obeying Me together as a family is the context that I as a Father have ordained to be the supply for My people.”*

*God wants every single born-again believer to play a role. Each has a God-ordained role in the local church in the city or the region where they live. It says in Hebrews 10:25, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourself together.” Now it is talking in context to the local church here. “Do not forsake the gathering together as is the* ***manner*** *of some.” “It is the* ***habit*** *of some,” another translation says. Rather go in the opposite direction, exhorting one another to be faithful to God and to God’s purposes so much the more even as you see the second coming of Christ approaching closer and closer. What the writer of Hebrews is saying—you can see the time frame that we are getting closer to the coming of the Lord, the day of the Lord—with even more urgency, “Do not forsake gathering together.”*

*There are many dimensions of what happens in gathering together; do not forsake it. There is escalating evil, and there is an escalating manifestation of glory. But, that glory is only going to be in context to the larger family of God dwelling together, valuing, pursuing, connecting one to another, bigger than their little sphere of three or four friends.*

*Many embrace a churchless Christianity that encourages an isolated, “anything goes,” Christian lifestyle. In “isolated Christianity,” our tendency over months and years is to drift away from essentials that were once dear to us. A year goes by, five years go by, ten years go by, and in isolation things that were dear and assumed as valuable are now very minimized or out of our life, and it happens in such a slow process.*

*Our safety and our fullness are in functioning together in that sense of belonging one to another in the Body of Christ. It says in Proverbs 18:1 that the man who isolates himself seeks his own desire. He rages against all wise judgment.*

*The Lord is saying that there are blessings for all of us, which we cannot even fully measure, that we get by just being in the life of the Body. Not that it is always exciting or dynamic. By just the everyday life of belonging together, there is safety, there is supply, there is increase of grace that comes, not to mention the fact we are joints of supply of this to others who are in great need.*

1. The community of believers in the New Testament
	1. The NT community was a result of the majority of the people embracing the lifestyle of Acts 2.

42They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine [teaching] and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers…45divided them among all, as anyone had need.
(Acts 2:42-45)

*So we want to be a Church against whom the gates of hell do not prevail. We want to be a Church, we want to be a spiritual family that has this sense of belonging to one another at all the different maturity levels and in all profiles, resource bases, education, and giftedness of all the members because we are so moved by the love of God that we have received in our own individual lives.*

 *I am not talking about only our congregation of FCF. We are one of hundreds of congregations in south Kansas City and are even in some kind of relationship with many other congregations; I have relationship with many pastors in the Kansas City area and have for many years. Others of our leadership team have connections as well.*

 *It is not just an issue of all the churches getting together and having a big outreach once a year. It is a far more in-depth connection than things like that. Those things are nice, but that is not the measure of the connection. It is that we see the value and celebrate one another in different local spiritual families or congregations, knowing that relating together is necessary, that we function together as congregations in order to give the right picture of the Father's heart to this region of our city, this south part of our city where God has strategically placed us.*

*God strategically places every congregation in whatever part of the city or region that He wants them, and He gives them an assignment to reveal the Father to the unbelievers, but they can only reveal the Father as they dwell together. Again the radical, one-off, dedicated, isolated man or woman of God with greater miracle power than anybody cannot show the face of God in that city or region that God wants to be shown; it takes a collective Body valuing one another.*

*Particularly when the stronger ones value the weaker ones and give their resource, time, energy, and money to make the weaker ones stronger, that is a glorious supernatural reality that really shocks unbelievers when they see it consistently happening in a way that a one-time event does not. The one-time kind of extravagant love maybe does not move them, but when they see it persistently, they think, “What is moving you to use your resources, your strength, your time, your energy in this kind of way? It is common sense when you give to people who give back, but you guys give to people who can not give back in the natural sense.”*

*What a glorious reality because that is the way God loves us! We cannot give anything back to Him in the natural sense that enhances His profile. It does not work that way. He loves us because He is love; that is why He loves us.*

*We want to be a spiritual family that has this sense of belonging to one another at all different maturity levels and in all profiles, resource bases, education, and giftedness of all the members because we are so moved by the love of God that we have received in our own individual lives.*

*How do we do this? How do we dwell together as a Church like that? We go to the book of Acts. We study the biblical pattern, because there is an infiltration in this hour of the secular paradigm of community into the kingdom paradigm of community, particularly in Western world, but they are very, very different. The secular paradigm has so infiltrated the mindset of believers in our nation. I am not trying to be critical. I am trying to alert us so that we can be aware of it, because many believers are pursuing a secular paradigm of community thinking that, as long as it is community, it is kingdom.*

*Even though all the people involved have made a profession of faith in Jesus, together they are not necessarily walking out kingdom community, though they are hanging out together in entertainment, recreation, and pleasure. Not if they are not being bonded in the Spirit in the way that kingdom community talks about. A lot of folks are very confused by this, so we go to the Word to see what is essential for a kingdom community to function. I am going to highlight just five points, and most of them are self-evident right here in**Acts 2:42. Then I am adding one more point from verse 45.*

42They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine [teaching] and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers…45divided them among all, as anyone had need.
(Acts 2:42-45)

* + 1. ***Apostles’ doctrine***: Receiving teaching and personally studying the Scripture

*It says that they continued* ***steadfastly****. In other words, not occasionally, not when they were in the mood for it. It was a commitment of the routine of their lifestyle. They were steadfast in the apostles’ doctrine. Meaning —I will just say it simply—they valued the Word of God. It was not just a book on a shelf that they dusted off every now and then. They valued a daily interaction with the Word by hearing it from others and reading it themselves.*

* + 1. ***Fellowship***: Serving and sharing life in the Spirit and the Word with others requires more than socializing around entertainment and pleasure

3…that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son…
7If we walk in the light… we have fellowship with one another… (1 John 1:3-7)

*Secondly, steadfastly they were in fellowship. Again, kingdom fellowship is different than the secular paradigm of just hanging out together, because the goal of kingdom fellowship is to connect with God, to build people up in the Holy Spirit, to bring the grace of God to unbelievers, and then for believers to strengthen the new believers in their faith. “To strengthen them in their faith” does not mean they just get happier in God, but we help them to become useful so they can be a vessel or a joint of supply to lead other people to the Lord and to strengthen other people as well.*

*Kingdom fellowship has vibrancy in it where we are communicating the heart of God to one another. Not that every conversation is intrinsically spiritual, but our goal and our connection is to build each other up in the Spirit and to equip each other, even in personal conversation. So our times together equip them, empower them, and encourage them to be people who lead others to the Lord and disciple them. That is what kingdom fellowship is.*

*Kingdom fellowship does not happen because four or five people who are involved in a church have a movie night together, and they hang out, and they do four or five other things on top of it. I am not against watching a movie. That is not my point. But some people think if we hang out together for entertainment—we play, we do video games all night, we do recreation, as long as we hang out together—and we profess Jesus, it must be fellowship. Beloved, that is not fellowship. Most of that is a waste of time!*

*It diminishes our spiritual life. It does not build up our spiritual life. The kind of connection that actually dilutes and dulls our spirit is not fellowship. But many Christians get confused by this, and they say. “Well, I mean he loves Jesus or he says he does, and we hang out together, and that is not fellowship?” No, no! That is hanging out together.*

* + 1. ***Breaking bread***: Realigning our hearts to obey God and repair relationships

*Number three, they break bread together. Now the point of breaking bread is to realign ourselves to obey the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Through the breaking of bread the early believers recommitted themselves to repair relationships that were injured by taking the initiative in humility. We find out a verse later they broke bread every single day. Here is what happened. In the breaking of bread, people would stop and ask, “Is there anything I have done in my life that is a compromise to the Holy Spirit’s leadership in my life?” When they feel that there is something, they confess it, they get it right, they receive forgiveness, they push delete.*

*The breaking of bread is the affirmation of that realignment under the covenant and under His leadership, but that is not the end of breaking of bread. It goes beyond that. The breaking of bread is also saying that I am in an injured relationship, and I am committed—I am not sure I can get it healed—but I am committed to take initiative in humility to do my part.*

*So we take the bread in an affirmation of those two commitments. If we take communion, but we do not recommit ourself to His leadership to obey it, and we do not recommit ourself to initiate humility to repair relationships, that breaking of bread is just a snack time in a church service. It is like taking a five-minute break, have a little juice and crackers, or wine and crackers if you are in those other churches. My point being, it is only a snack if we do not realign ourselves. In the early church daily they would recommit themselves to full obedience and to repairing relationships by initiating humility from their point of view. That is radical. That is what is critical for kingdom community.*

* + 1. ***Prayer***: Embracing regular worship and intercession, and praying for one another

*The fourth aspect is prayer. Beloved, this is a remarkable thing. I am saying this to so that you would feel a sense of gratitude. We have done the hard work. It is not all done. I look back, and I was just thinking of it this morning, I mean I am just blown away with gratitude that God showed His zeal thirty years ago. Many of you know the story—and those that are new, maybe you do not know the story—thirty years ago the way that God supernaturally confirmed His zeal that we would have a prayer room. I am saying this tongue-in-cheek—He went out of His way to make it happen.*

*We have a prayer room going fourteen years now. He gave us the wherewithal by the way He intervened in order to establish it and sustain it for fourteen years. I have good news for you—He is going to answer every single one of the prayers that have been offered from that prayer room. Hundreds of thousands of man-hours. I am talking about 100 people in a room praying for an hour—that is 100 man-hours. Hundreds of thousands of prayers for the fullness of the Spirit to hit the church in Kansas City.*

*Beloved, do you think one of those prayers has gone unnoticed by God? My Bible tells me not. God has answered a few of them, but I tell you there is going to be a deluge of the breaking in of God in answer to fourteen years of prayers. I do not know when the timing of a huge breakthrough is, but I know this—Jesus went out of His way to see that we did this. He talked about having a grand view of the Kingdom, walking out a community together based on this kind of history. Beloved, that is a glorious thing that He has given us, but it is not enough to have a prayer furnace.*

*It is not enough for a few individuals to have power. God wants more than a prayer furnace. He wants more than a few anointed people, more than a few good worship teams and a few good preachers. He wants a community with the sense of belonging, where the stronger ones in the Lord value the weaker ones and pursue them and give them a sense of belonging and call them forth and partner with them. He wants a demonstration of His heart as a Father to this city, not just through us, but also through every single church that will say yes to Him, every congregation. It is a glorious thing. I look at that prayer furnace, and I think, “Oh, my goodness. When the Lord pours out that bowl of prayers related to this city, I mean thousands and thousands of prayers, your children and grandchildren are going to be the recipients of a deluge of blessing.”*

*Even now we are in days where the Lord is saying, “I want the spiritual family dimension to be not only strengthened, but to be* ***massively*** *strengthened in your midst.” That is the Ephesians 4/Zechariah 4 thing I told you about last fall, for those that heard that. I taught it several weeks in a row.*

* + 1. ***As anyone had need***: Giving to meet the real needs of others

*Number five. Now these five things I am highlighting are not comprehensive. There are another twenty I could list from the book of Acts. One of the values of the early church was meeting the needs of people in need. It is not enough for us just to enjoy one another. One part of us enjoying one another and receiving from God is being a vessel that gives the grace of God, and as we are joints of supply to others by the giving to those in need, we actually encounter more.*

* 1. Embracing the Acts 2 lifestyle is essential to a New Testament community of believers.

43Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43-47)

1. Taking initiative to love: by building relationships
	1. We are called to take initiative in building strong relationships and loving people. Our temptation is to wait passively for others to pursue us. Many passively wait for this with a spirit of entitlement. Do not wait for someone to befriend you. Take initiative to show kindness by serving people and hearing their story without demanding that they hear yours or serve you.

3Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on…your heart. 4So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man. (Prov. 3:3-4; NAS)

* 1. It is common to pursue people on the condition that they will give us something in return. Jesus called us to a greater love than this (Mt. 5:46).

46“If you love those who love you, what reward have you...the tax collectors do the same?” (Mt. 5:46)

1. Healthy kingdom relationships
	1. Healthy kingdom relationships have a *missional dimension* of reaching out to serve others.
	2. Healthy kingdom relationships value the *discipline of regularly meeting and relating.*
	3. Healthy kingdom relationships are committed to *growing spiritually*. The fasted lifestyle enhances relationship building. We are not to fast from people, but from our selfish desires, so that we can give ourselves more to Jesus and to serve people in the will of God.
	4. Healthy kingdom relationships are *open-handed* with a free spirit without demanding exclusivity.
	5. Healthy kingdom relationships *encourage* others, or put courage in the heart of others.

*We want to be a church with a missional dimension where we strengthen the needy, believers or unbelievers, and win the lost and we disciple them. That is what we are about.*

*I had a conversation with some guy some months ago, but I have heard these conversations throughout the years of IHOPKC. He said, “We take two or three nights a week just to hang out together. We watch movies, play video games, play cards together, just kind of hanging, just seeing what happens, you know, joking around, having little Bible discussions, Bible debates.” I suspect mostly debates about why the Bible does not call them to be wholehearted. Many debates are affirming that false concept.*

*I said to the guy, “You know what? Two or three nights a week playing cards, video games, watching movies while Kansas City is going to hell, why are you doing that? Why don’t you throw your movies away”—I am not against movies. I am against a lot of them but not all of them—“throw your card games away”—I do not even know anything about cards but anyway, maybe they are good, maybe they are bad, I do not even know—“Why don’t you get four or five of you together and go disciple four or five thirteen-year-old young boys and make them disciples? Why don’t you do that with those friends three nights a week?”*

*“Well, I do not know. We are just hanging out.”*

*“Beloved, you are not in community! You are in a counterfeit community. You are in a delusion, a distortion! That is not the kingdom of God, and it is diminishing and dulling your spirit. You are not being built up in the Holy Spirit.” I said, “You are not being bonded in the Spirit to each other by those times. You are not changing anybody in the Holy Spirit outside of your group, and you are not doing anything that is going to be remembered at the judgment seat of Christ at the end of your life. Get rid of that thing, and throw yourself into the kingdom! I mean you know Jesus, you are born again, you got the Holy Spirit, and what are you doing?”*

*“Well, I do not know. Just kind of hanging out, chilling in the grace of God.”*

*I said, “Get rid of that rubbish thinking. You’ve only got a minute on the earth, and the city is going to hell right now, and we are vessels of His glory. Don’t you see who you are?”*

1. Rejoicing and weeping together (Rom. 12:15)
	1. Healthy relationships share one another’s blessings and burdens with a sense of belonging. Cultivating strong relationships with a sense of belonging includes mutually sharing our deeper feelings, thoughts, and experiences with each other. This includes both hearing and sharing our blessings, dreams, sacrifices, pains, setbacks, and struggles. The small portion that is shared in a group setting gives others the insight and permission to go deeper outside of the group.

15Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (Rom. 12:15)

* 1. ***Share their blessings***:Celebrate the victories and prosperity of others—it is part of belonging
	2. ***Share in their nobility***:See and speak a glimpse of their nobility—it strengthens them
	3. ***Understand their heart passions***:Understand their longings, dreams, and godly intentions
	4. ***Know their sacrifices***: Acknowledge their sacrifices in obeying God and serving people
	5. ***Bear their burden***: Help in both the routine and intense burdens of their life
	6. ***Share their pain***: Hear and feel their pain and walk with them through difficulties
	7. ***Share their struggle with failure***: Understand and cover them in their struggle and failure

*I will just end with this short story. I am just so grateful that forty-some years ago, whatever it was, in 1971, I met the Lord in June of 1971. It is five weeks later, and I am fifteen years old. I know the Lord five weeks. I do not know anything except that I love Him and He loves me, and I hardly understand that.*

*All of my friends are unbelievers. I do not have one Christian friend. We are playing basketball one night. It is midnight, and we stumbled into Colonial Presbyterian Church down at 95th and Wornall because we heard they had a basketball court.*

*So we are playing before midnight, and we got kicked out of one place. One guy’s parents said, “Go, get out of here,” so we had to leave.*

*I said I saw a court once at that church, so we went there. They had a discipleship house where some guys lived together, and there was a light on in the house even though it was midnight. The lights are off at the court, so I said, “Let's see if they will go and turn the lights on so we can play our game.”*

*There are four guys at the house. They are all in their twenties—twenty-one, twenty-two years old—and they had been praying and fasting—it is Friday night—that they could impact a high school. On their Friday nights, what they would do is gather to pray—four of them—and fast and say they had to find some high school kids, lead them to the Lord, and teach them to disciple people. That was what they were doing with their Friday nights, these four guys. They are twenty-one, twenty-two-years old.*

*Beloved, that is a wise thing. So I come walking in with a few guys, and we are thinking, “Hey, what is going on here?” They are sitting in a circle. We interrupt them in prayer. We did not know what they were doing. I never saw a prayer meeting. I did not know that is what they were doing.*

*It is the end of their three-day fast, and here we walk in right into the trap. I say hi, and they look at me, and they must have thought, “He is one of my guys.” No, I do not know that is what they were thinking. They say, “Hey, we will meet you tomorrow and play basketball.” These are busy guys. They thought, “We are going to invest in this kid.”*

*Okay, next day we show up to play them. They were old guys in their twenties. We are fifteen; we know we can beat them. They did not tell us the youth pastor was a college all-American basketball player. He had his best game ever that next day—that is another story—and I thought what is going on?*

*These guys said, “We are going to invest in them.” They got me in their swirl. I did not have a clue what they were about or anything. So they said, “We want to meet with you every week.”*

*“Okay, for what?”*

*“Well, we are just going to teach you the Bible.”*

*“Okay, I guess I should learn it, I just said yes to Jesus.” I do not even know anything about the Bible. I did not know the difference between an epistle and an apostle, a gospel, a disciple. I did not know any of that stuff.*

*So a guy said, “We will meet with two or three of you every week.” They made a real time commitment. I did not get that then.*

*Then a few months later—the nerve of these guys, it’s only six months later—they say now it is time. I am sixteen by this point, and they say, “It is now time for you to go find some thirteen-year-olds and do with them what we just did with you.” They convinced me to be a soul-winner and a disciple-maker in six months.*

*Well, they were all doing it. I said that I do not know how to do this but they said that it is quite simple do these three things. I was scared, but I did it. Everybody was doing it. My point is, it is forty years later, or however long later, and I am still doing it.*

*It was a couple of twenty-one-year old guys deciding that, instead of chilling out in the grace of God in some weird secular way and calling it community, they were going to find the will of God and break into some high schools in this city. Nobody told them to—they just loved Jesus.*

*Well, I could go on and on. I think I am going to end with that. Amen, let’s stand. There is no good way to end that story. I am stirred up. I want us to be that community, I do not want to be a spiritually bored people with the secular community paradigm that is a false imitation counterfeit, thinking we are in community.*

*In the secular community paradigm, they do not bond in their spirits, they do not change anyone’s life, and they do not do anything that lasts at the judgment seat. That is not community; that is a fake substitute. I want to go for God, book-of-Acts-style, devoted to the Word, devoted to prayer, devoted to fellowshipping in the Holy Spirit, devoted to reaching out, devoted to sowing into young fifteen-year-boys like they did with me.*

*That is what we want to be together, I want the strongest among us to pursue the weakest among us and not to wait to be pursued, but to go pursue others.*

*Amen. I want to just lead you in a ninety-second prayer, and then we will end with that. I invite you for ministry if you want, but it is where you say “yes” again. I know most of you have said yes, but just to say yes again. You are saying, “Holy Spirit, I want to give myself to three or four young people.” You can do it in a friendship group, get ten or twenty of you, gang up together on three young guys and disciple them and teach them to be disciples.*

*You say, “I do not know how to do it,” well, a friendship group can do it together. Go do it with the three or four people in your neighborhood—go find some unbelievers, but team up together to lead those people to the Lord and disciple them. It is divine entertainment; that is what this is.*