

GETTING BETTER

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Today we are kicking off a series of articles about how we can love each other better as a church family. During his vision sermon on January 8, Bro. Chad said that one of the things that we need to get better at as a church is **loving one another**...loving those outside of our church and inside of our church. If you missed the sermon, I encourage you to watch it or watch it again at vision.fbcallen.org.

John 13:34-35 says:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Loving one another wasn't a new concept for the people who heard Jesus speak these words. The “new” was the way we were to love one another... “*just as I have loved you.*” Jesus' love was different from what they had seen or experienced before. His love took it to another level. Jesus' love was **unconditional, sacrificial, unending and for all**. He didn't just love the people that loved Him, agreed with Him, thought like Him, dressed like Him or believed in Him. There were **no strings attached**.

Jesus said that type of love would be the way we would be identified as His disciples, as His followers. It's important to note that when Jesus is saying all of this, He is just with His disciples. He's not preaching to a large crowd. He's talking to a small group of His closest followers and He's telling them that their love for one another would be how the rest of the world would know that they belong to Him. Jesus wanted His followers (and the church) to know the importance of how we take care of each other and the impact that would have on a world that doesn't know Him.

Here's a question for you. If someone walked into our church on a Sunday morning, either in worship or in one of our Bible studies, could they tell we are

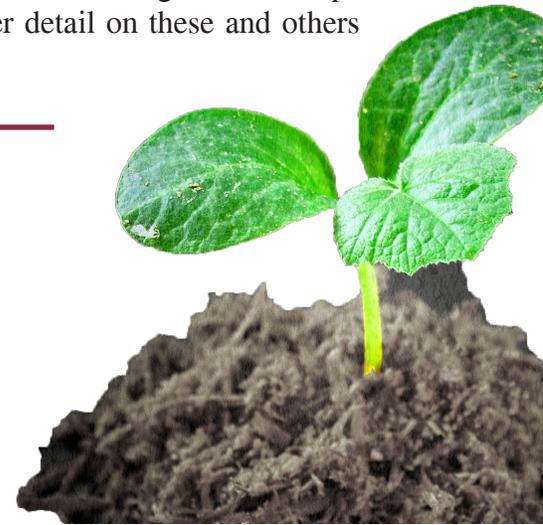
followers of Jesus? They would hear us singing about Jesus. They would see us reading from the Bible. They would see us praying. But would they see us loving one another? Would they see us caring about one another? Would it feel like family?

This type of love is attractive to people who are not a part of the church. They will take notice. Imagine a church where individuals and families are valued, cared for and encouraged. Imagine a church where people are not judged, where burdens are shared, where people have a voice and where people feel heard. That type of environment, that type of church, is what people hunger for. Individuals and families will say “We want that!” and many of them will wonder why this church is so different.

Our love for one another has the potential to draw people to our church or open doors in the community to give us a platform to tell them about the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So how do we create that type of environment here at FBC Allen? How do we love one another better? Here are three ideas that would be great first steps. We will go into greater detail on these and others in later posts:

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1. TRANSPARENCY...

If we never get past talking about sports, the weather or the latest news, then we will never have any depth in conversations with one another. So many people are afraid to let everyone else know they don't have it all together. Depth requires vulnerability and that is scary for people. Don't worry, we are all a mess. We all have our stuff that we are dealing with. Great comfort and peace come when we start sharing our stories so that others can see that they are not alone. They are not alone in the struggles, in their doubts, in their questions, in their insecurities or in their pain.

2. GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU...

We make a lot of assumptions when we are talking with other church members. We assume everyone thinks like we do, believes like we do, votes like we do. The truth is our church is made up of different types of people who have different opinions, thoughts, and life situations. Someone might make a negative comment about people who are dealing with addiction while not knowing that the church member sitting right next to them has a close family member who's struggling with an alcohol addiction. When we assume, then we end up hurting others and communicating that this is not a safe place. We will not know the people around us until we take the time to get to know the people around us.

3. SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN BE UNDERSTOOD...

Stephen Covey wrote about this in his book "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." When discussing this topic, Covey uses the illustration of a doctor who prescribes before he ever does any diagnosis. We would never go to a doctor who didn't listen or diagnose and just gave us medicine. How would that doctor know the problem or how to help if he or she never took the time to listen? However, when it comes to communication, most of us are guilty of giving "fixes" before we even understand the problem. Proverbs 18:13 says, "*To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.*" Successful relationships require good listeners. As a church family, it's vitally important that we listen to one another and try to understand before we ever presume to know how to help.

The success of FBC Allen's reach to our community starts at home...our church home. We need to learn to love one another better. If we become what Jesus talks about in John 13:34-35, then our city will take notice and we will have the opportunity to better love the people outside our church walls.

