

Love People

Created to Live SENT Message Series

Week Four

Welcome

Welcome to Indian Creek. I'm glad we can share this part of our weekend together. We are in week four of a six part series, *Created to Live SENT*. I'm hearing some great stories of how we are stretching and growing as we learn to love God, love people and live out the love of God. Whether you've heard every message or not I invite you to jump right in today. By the way the other messages are available on the podcast or media through our website.

I want to tell you a story to get started that comes from the book, backwards, which we are reading together.

Kelly Barcol's Story

Kelly was a hurting teenager who managed to find trouble at every turn. He had a quick temper and a smart mouth. It often got him into trouble. He was a small guy in stature. He was defensive about his size and everything else for that matter. Sports were natural (and legal) ways for him to act out his aggression. He played baseball, basketball and football from ages 7–14.

But in 9th grade Kelly dropped out of every sport and became a blackout drinker. He often smoked marijuana before going to school. In 10th grade he started wrestling. It gave him the opportunity to hurt his opponent which, as he tells the story, was a good way to deal with the pain life handed him. He struggled in school and his teachers assumed he was intellectually slow. Relationships were hot and cold for him. Few things in his life seemed to be trending up and to the right for him.

No one invested in Kelly in a positive way...that is until a wrestling coach saw through Kelly's actions to the positive qualities often masked from the world. The coach saw a guy with talent, a quick wit, and a tender heart. Kelly was a good athlete and the wrestling team needed him, so the coach had extra motivation.

Over time the trend downward continued. Kelly was suspended from school several times for fighting which kept him on the border line of being a dropout. At home Kelly was raised by his dad and his granny. His dad worked hard but then spent a lot of time at the bar after work. He went to Kelly's games but stayed outside the gate so he could drink.

The wrestling coach decided it was time to take a risk. He decided to step in and call Kelly out on the choices Kelly made. At times Kelly responded positively and made progress. Other times he stayed on the fringes. Consistency wasn't his strong suit. Kelly had as many losses as wins on his record, not just in athletics but in life, but he kept showing up.

During this time there was another man in Kelly's life. This one man was as consistent as Kelly was inconsistent. He invested in Kelly repeatedly and made multiple invitations for Kelly to attend his church. Over time Kelly opened his heart to him. Because of the investment, Kelly eventually said, *Yes*. This guy wasn't deterred by the bravado of Kelly's words. He saw through the act. He knew what Kelly really needed was a relationship with God, His heavenly Father. He knew that more than anything Kelly needed to find his way back to God, but he also needed positive role models to point him in the right direction.

Once Kelly accepted the invitation to church and to a couple of campus organizations he met a whole group of students. Through the influence of these key people who took an interest in him and a set of circumstances that only the Holy Spirit could arrange, Kelly reached out to Jesus. He started by asking Him to forgive him and lead his life.

The change was dramatic! Kelly knew real love for the first time. He quickly found freedom from shame, drugs, and alcohol. His relationships improved. An entire group of Christian college students who were also spiritually seeking also, surrounded him with the community he needed for his own journey. Kelly felt hope for the first time in a long time.

Soon Kelly met and married Polly, a cheerleader and one of the co-eds in the group. Though they were brand new to him, Kelly began to explore the scriptures. He found a good church. He discovered he was a leader and a gifted one at that!

Kelly started reaching out to others like a few men had reached out to him. His story connected with others and before long Kelly was leading others to find the life he found in Jesus. In the process Kelly was becoming more and more like Jesus.

Today Kelly is a dynamic pastor who started a church, House of Joy from a very small group, mostly his own family in Valdosta, Georgia. The fledgling church has grown to 300 plus in five short years and shows no signs of slowing down. You would never guess that would have been his future had you met Kelly in his teen years! If you'd told Kelly as a teen what the future held for him, he would have laughed at the idea.

What happened?

What happened? How did Kelly achieve such an abrupt turnaround? For one thing he learned the truth about who he was and why he was here. Jesus came to redeem Kelly and us from self destruction. Jesus wants to do the same for any who will accept His grace and follow Him.

Isaiah 61:1, 2 NLT

Jesus said, *the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*

He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.^{1d}

² *He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come.*

Kelly became a part of something he'd never had before—a healthy community that became like family; the family of God. In that atmosphere of love and acceptance Kelly thrived. As Kelly felt security he began to reach out to others to share what he was learning. His story drew others to Christ. Lives were impacted and destinies were changed.

You, too, can experience the life changing power of Jesus. It will be good for you. You will have your own turn-around story. You, too, can join a community of love, acceptance and support, a family--the family of God and experience life lived in community. It doesn't have to stop with you—your story will speak to others. What a privilege to be a partner with God in the grand story of redemption!

Kelly needed to know someone cared. He needed *love with skin on* as Dr. James Dobson once described a community of people who love and follow Jesus together. **Kelly needed to belong in order to believe.**

Destined for Community

We all need a place to belong. From the very beginning God created humans to live in community. God put Adam in a beautiful garden but do you remember what He said?

Genesis 2:17 NLT

And the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

It is significant that God said six times during creation that things were *good*. The creation of the universe was good. The creation of the earth was good. The creation of the animals was good. And the creation of man was *very good*. But when it came to living alone—that was *not good*.

What do you think? Was He right?

Made for Community

Our culture believes that, don't we? **Do you remember the song that said, *One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do?*** Okay, I'm dating myself but since I brought it up, do you remember who recorded that song and when? Very good! Three Dog Night! We won't form our theology from Three Dog Night but the point is that even our culture knows we were made for more than one. We were created for community.

Do you remember the words of the poem by John Donne, *No man is an island?* His point is that everything we do and everything others do actually affect us so connect into community.

Singles don't like to be called "singles" because it sounds like they are alone. In reality they have a nuclear family or extended family and a social network of friends, co-workers and neighbors.

The Trinity

We were created for community by our very design. **Even the Trinity is three-in-one, God the Father, God the son which is Jesus and God as the Holy Spirit.**

The Family

The family unit is another example of community. You can't help but see the resemblance to Father, Spirit and Son in the way the family is designed and functions.

From single families came the extended family where generations of families stayed connected and gained support. How many attend family reunions? Sometimes 80 persons or more gather to connect and share stories and heritage. A great sense of being a part of a larger family and belonging motivate such gatherings. What a great way for cousins to see each other and for aunts, uncles, grandparents and even great grandparents to connect!

The point is that it is natural for us to connect into community.

Here is a reality—not all of us have a natural human connection in our family. Some families are dysfunctional and many are disconnected through divorce. A lot of brokenness surrounds our families in America and the world. We've experienced that in our own family personally. Our nuclear and biological family is fractured so it doesn't always provide the community we need.

However, I encourage you; don't give up on your earthly family! You have the Trinity's help to apply divine strength, forgiveness, and grace. You may need to be the one to bring the power of God to your family. Let God use you to make a difference.

The Family of God

I'm also grateful that God has provided a forever family for everyone who accepts the grace and leadership of Jesus. Will you read this scripture aloud with me?

John 1:12 NLT

To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

It is a comfort to know that God's plan was for you to be included in family. Even if you don't find community in your family of origin, He designed a forever family, which is the church, for you if you follow Him.

God desires that families be united, redeemed, and restored. He practices community in His family and He is able to send you into your family as a person of peace to bring His light, love and truth. The reality is that others make their own choices, but never quit contending for God's best in your family. The community that is the church was never meant to be a substitute but an addition or completion. You were designed for community at home, in your neighborhood and in your church. It is worth contending for and your undying effort.

Love People

In the *Created to Live SENT* series we are learning that our goal in life is to be reformed in the image or nature of Jesus and that is what it means to be a follower of Jesus today. To help us remember we focus on **the 3Ls: We Love God, we Love people and we Live Out the love of Jesus.** In doing so we are practicing the life of Jesus daily.



Last week we learned that the First Great Commandment is to love the LORD our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. This week we are remembering what Jesus said next.

Matthew 22:39

The second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself.

You are your brother's keeper God said as far back as the beginning of the first book in the Bible—Genesis.

God, like any good father, desires that His children get along and love one another. If we love God we will naturally love one another and if we don't love others, then we can't say that we love God.

Loving God is the vertical part of our relationship and loving others is the horizontal part of our relationship and together they form the cross.

Let me share a story of what community can look like when it is working well inside the church. This is the story of a young single woman, Chelsea who was exploring a community group for the very first time.

Chelsea Harvey's Story

I took my son, Jeremy, and his son, Landon to the Lenexa, Kansas, BBQ cook-off. We joined my neighbors, Harry and Doug, who were competing. They had a tent where many of us gathered to cheer them on and of course eat their food! I ran into Chelsea there.

At the time Chelsea was just a year out of Pittsburg State University. She's a social worker. She is a young adult who is not married. She'd been attending Indian Creek for the previous two years. She had made a commitment to follow Christ and was baptized just the prior year. With her eyes wide she pulled me off to one side and confessed, *I can't believe what happened at my community group last night!*

She proceeded to tell me she had gone to her group with a bit of an attitude because things hadn't been going smoothly for her lately. She was frustrated with God and had some doubts about whether He cared about what she cared about. She was amazed that when she shared openly with her group, they listened and took her doubts to heart. They connected with her at a soul level.

They discussed her concerns with honesty and to them there were no dumb questions. She found acceptance, some answers that night and she learned that her group was there for her. That was encouraging, but it was just the beginning of the story.

Something else happened in the group that was a completely new experience for her. When the group got ready to pray they divided into two groups: one consisted of guys and one comprised of the girls. The girls went downstairs for some privacy. One of the young women spoke directly to Chelsea, shared a scripture with her and challenged her to step up to a new level of faith. As that was happening Chelsea said she heard God speak clearly to her spirit and give her exactly what she needed to hear.

With tears in her eyes Chelsea said, *I've never had that happen to me. It was awesome!*

But there was more! A young woman in the group dissolved into tears and began to cry. Curious and wanting to be supportive the other ladies gathered around her. Encouraged by their support, she shared a financial need she'd been trying to keep a secret.

She and her husband were going to be evicted from their apartment if they didn't produce \$1,000 for rent within a day. They didn't have the resources to do it and they didn't have a place to go. They weren't sure where to turn, so they had turned to their group.

Has your husband shared this with the guys? One of the young women asked.

No, we are embarrassed, was the answer.

Someone in the group offered, *We will pray, but we need to talk about this as a group and pray for both of you.* And they did.

The group didn't stop there. Chelsea could hardly talk now because she started to cry which brought tears to my eyes as I listened. Chelsea then related that miraculously enough, the ladies in the group had opened their purses and started to pool their money to help to meet the need of the couple. The girls went upstairs and discussed it as a group. This time the guys participated. However, the group were just short of collecting the full \$1,000 needed.

The group decided to go to the closest ATM together. There they took turns and withdrew money until they had enough to cover the rent! They presented it to the grateful couple. Then to celebrate they went out to eat ice cream together and had a great time!

I've never experienced anything like that! Chelsea declared.

That BBQ tent became holy ground for a moment as Chelsea and I hugged and thanked God for the love that is present when God's people unite. That is community at its best! When you live *SENT* you are never alone. That community group loved God as they studied and prayed. That's true worship! They heard from God through the scriptures and prayer. They **loved** each other by listening and speaking the truth in love. Then they **lived out** their faith by giving sacrificially without judgment. God was honored, and their lives witnessed to the love of Jesus and His followers.

Community is possible for you, too, when you connect into the body of Christ which is the Church. A year previous Chelsea didn't know that it even existed, but now she's committed to living in community. She wouldn't think of doing life alone! God never intended any of us to be

an island to ourselves. You don't have to do life alone. If you've found your way back to God, He is with you in Spirit living inside you.

Matthew 28:20 NLT

Jesus promised, *Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

But there is more! Everyone who follows Christ becomes a child of God, so you are family with others who comprise what the Bible calls the *body of Christ*. You are a part of a huge global family!

Commenting on this, the Apostle Paul said:

All of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27 NLT

This body is not limited by genetics, geographical locations, age, gender, or political parties! The body of Christ is there for you as an extended family. It is meant to strengthen you and support throughout your life's journey. Expect it. Look for it. Provide it for others. Many times the community of Christ has kept a person on their feet. Jesus knows the heartache of broken families and that is why he admits,

Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. **Mark 3:35 NLT**

Q. How do we live in Community in a practical sense?

The Inner Circle

Think of a series of circles that begins small but reaches further with each new circle. The starting place is your community with God. The next circle is your family of origin or your present family. The next is an inner circle of close friends and mentors.

Even Jesus had an inner circle of three: Peter, James, and John who shared life with Him in His most intimate moments.

The Inner Circle of Friends

It is important to seek out community. We all need community of an inner circle. An inner circle might contain a life-long friend or two, a mentor, a work associate, or a person from a different generation. For example I have an accountability group that I've met with for nearly ten years now. We are close like a family. We meet weekly. We laugh a lot. But we also challenge each other and ask the important questions.

A Community Group

The next ring in the concentric circles is a community group where you share life together. A community group takes a form similar to how an extended family operated in a different age and culture. They share life. They care for one another's needs. They pray for each other. They support each other, and cheer each other on in life. Who doesn't need that!

Sometimes this group meets in a home, but it can also be a group of mothers who talk in a circle while their children play. The lunchroom at work or a restaurant serves as a place where people meet on a noon break from work. Serving is another thing that brings a group together and community happens.

A community group functions best when it is ten or more and less than twenty. If it is smaller than ten it easily becomes exclusive and ingrown. If it is more than twenty it becomes difficult for everyone in the group to participate in the conversations. Since this is true groups will want to work to develop new leaders continually, so groups can grow, multiply, and create new groups. New groups need to be continually created so that new people joining the church can also find community. It is important to remember that as great as a community group is, it can't be everything to everyone.

For that we need a growing, real relationship with Jesus Christ, a family, an inner circle, and a vital connection with the greater body of Christ. You may not have all of these functioning at any one time, but living in community in the various circles provides sweet community through the seasons of life.

In conclusion listen to this story.

The story of Dave and Lisa Cox

Dave and Lisa were new attendees to Indian Creek Community Church and they didn't have any family in town. Dave played bass on the worship team and the worship team group had developed a sense of community. Dave even overhauled a trailer to haul worship supplies back and forth from the school we rented for our Sunday gatherings.

One summer Dave, Lisa and their two children were vacationing on a camping trip to a remote area completely out of contact. Meanwhile unbeknownst to them back home a pipe burst in their bathroom. Water flooded the upstairs running down into the lower level, out the garage, and down the driveway. Their neighbors didn't know how to reach Dave and Lisa (before cell phones) but they remembered they had seen the Indian Creek logo and phone on the Cox's little trailer which was parked on the side of the driveway.

The neighbors called the church office to report the trouble. No one had any contact information to reach Dave and Lisa. However, a couple of the vocalists in the worship band, Margaret Outler and DeAnna Murguia, decided to investigate and see if there was anything they could do to help their friends. When DeAnna and Margaret arrived at the home of the Cox's, they saw water running out the garage door and down the driveway.

At the bottom of the garage door was a small doggy door. Was it large enough for someone to crawl through to the inside? Dee and Margaret decided to try. To do so they would have to crawl through the water. What if they got stuck? Would the neighbors think they were breaking in? They assessed the situation and acknowledged the questions and decided to take the risk.

They made it in! They were wet, but they were inside. They found the problem. A water pipe to the toilet was broken. They found the water main to the house and shut it off. They wondered if

they could find the name and number of the insurance company that served Dave and Lisa. They wanted to save further damage by the delay of waiting for Dave and Lisa to return. Since no one had a number for the Cox family and delay would incur more damage, Margaret and De Anna took the liberty to look on the top of Dave's desk. After all, the Bible says to *do to others as you would have them do for you* and they would want this kind of help.

They found the number for the insurance company and called! They sent an adjuster out right away and before Dave and Lisa even returned home the repair was underway. Dave and Lisa were pleased that Margaret and DeAnna had taken the initiative. That incident gave them a sense of belonging in the group and in the church. This is an example of the body being the body! This is what community does. You need it! And your community needs you.

Where truth and life meet

Community groups are the context in which God's Word comes to life. It is where the scriptures and life meet. They care for one another, they study and apply the scriptures, they find ways to have fun together and they pick projects where they can serve together.

I hope each of us is regularly meeting with a community group to learn and apply what it means to live SENT. If you are not in a group yet, we've placed the existing groups on an insert in the worship folder today along with the contact information of the leader.

If you attend this week we will be discussing what we are learning today so you can jump right in.

Be a Friend

Remember and practice the old adage, *To have a friend you must be a friend*. Don't wait for people to come to you and serve you. Take the first step to reach out to others. Make it your goal to leave a deposit of love in every person you meet, and you will find that you reap what you sow. What you give to others will come back to you multiplied several times over.

Let's Pray

Loving God and loving people go naturally together like putting a hand inside a glove. As we close in prayer today I hope you will make a commitment with me to determine you will always, from this time forward value living in community.

Realize you belong in the family of God and then act like it. Embrace the family God's provided for you.

Please pray with me.

Dear Jesus, thank You that You did not design us to live alone but inside of a community. You made us a part of Your forever family and You've placed us within a church—our church family. Each of us has something to give and we also admit we need each other. We are better together. Open our minds to link like a community. Open our hearts to act like a community. Lead us to love and live out Your love like a community. Thank You for it. Amen

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