



LifeGroup Study
2023-11-12
YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE
The Kingdom of ME
Leader Notes

OVERVIEW:

Welcome back to our series, You Are What You Love. The Kingdom of ME is a rival kingdom that competes for our love. This rival kingdom is seen in the worldview of Individualism - a me first, me focused priority. One of the subtle ways we can be drawn into this kingdom is through technology. To explore this topic we'll look at how technology, particularly our phones, social media and the internet, can influence us in a Me focused direction. In John 15, Jesus offers a powerful counter-invitation to individualism - wooing us to move from the kingdom of ME to the kingdom of WE (life with God and others).

ICEBREAKER: What's Your Tech Story?

On Sunday, Jeff shared a bit about his tech story, the history of his experience with digital technology in the 1980s all the way through having a smart phone today. What about you? What is your story when it comes to digital technology? Would you consider yourself an early adaptor when it comes to tech, or are you less inclined to get in on the latest tech upgrade right away? How do you see tech shaping your life today? **Share your story with the group.**

STUDY:

“Discipleship, we might say, is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love.”

James K.A. Smith You Are What You Love

YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

1. Throughout this series, we have been saying the phrase, “You are what you love.” **What do we mean by this? Why is this idea so important when we think about discipleship (following Jesus)?**

LEADER NOTES: Throughout this series, we have emphasized this idea, “You are what you love.” What we mean by this is that what we love in our heart makes up the core of who we are. What we *say* we love and what we *actually* love can be two different things. For example, I can *say* I love my wife, but if I spend my life dreaming about and devoting myself to golf, perhaps golf is what I actually love and am building my identity around. When it comes to discipleship, Jesus desires our heart. Why? Because Jesus knows that what (or who) we love is who we really are. This is why Jesus calls us love Him above everything else.

2. READ: Mark 12:28-31

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’^[a] ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’^[b] ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[c] There is no commandment greater than these.” NIV

- Read back through these verses and note every time the word “love” is used. **What does it look like to love God in these ways? How can Jesus ask us to do this even though he knows we won’t love perfectly?**

LEADER NOTES: In these verses, Jesus tells us we are to love God with all of who we are. This is why He says, “all your heart ... soul ... mind ... strength.” To love God is to be all-encompassing for us. In

this series, we have been emphasizing the importance of loving God with our heart, because what (or who) we choose to love from our heart impacts all of who we are (see Proverbs 4:23)

RIVAL KINGDOMS

Jesus' call on our lives is that we would make our heart his home. When this happens, the kingdom of God is alive and well in us. But, there are rival kingdoms that want to rule our heart. These rival kingdoms compete for our love and devotion. The rival kingdom we looked at on Sunday we called The Kingdom of ME.

The Kingdom of ME:

The kingdom of ME is a "me first", "me focused" priority. In this kingdom, SELF is on the throne.

3. READ: Matthew 16:24-26

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? NIV

- **In these verses, how does Jesus warn us about building the Kingdom of ME?**

LEADER NOTES: In these verses, Jesus warns that if we devote ourselves to building the Kingdom of ME (gain the whole world) in the end we will lose our life (forfeit our soul). Building the Kingdom of ME, Jesus warns, puts our soul in jeopardy. Your soul is priceless. This is why God invites us to entrust our soul to Him, the Caretaker of our soul.

4. READ: John 12:25

²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. NIV

- Jesus said, "Anyone who loves their life will lose it ...". **What does He mean by this?**

LEADER NOTES: "Loving our life" means putting ourselves first. To love our lives is to structure our lives around preserving ourselves above all else. Satisfying after our own desires and living out our own plan becomes our top priority. When we love ourselves first, Jesus warns, we will lose what we love most – our life. (also see Matthew 16:24-26)

- Jesus went on to say, "... anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it ..." **What does it mean to "hate" our life?**

LEADER NOTES: To "hate" our life is to say "no" to our own desires and inclinations and to say "yes" to God. Hating our lives involves self-denial and sacrifice. (see Matthew 16:24-26). When the Bible uses the word "hate" in this context, it is not talking about malicious intent. God loves us and He wants

us to see ourselves as loved by Him. To “hate” our lives means to love God first, to serve others, to be willing to say “no” to ourselves in the pursuit of our love of God and others.

Technology and the Kingdom of ME.

On Sunday, we considered the potential of digital technology, particularly our phones, social media and the internet, to orient us toward the Kingdom of ME.

In his article, “You Become *Like* What You ‘*Like*’ – Tony Reinke shares how digital technology has a powerful shaping influence in our lives. We can become, he says, like the Greek folklore character, Narcissus.

5. READ the following quote:

It’s awkward to say it this way, but like Narcissus staring down into the water, enchanted with himself, we bend over our phones—and what most quickly captures our attention is our own reflection: our replicated images, our tabulations of approval, and our accumulated “likes.” **Social media has become the new PR firm of the brand Self**, and we check our feeds compulsively and find it nearly impossible to turn away from looking at—and loving—our “second self.”¹So when we talk about “smartphone addiction,” often what we are talking about is the addiction of looking at ourselves. Tony Reinke – You Become Like What You “*Like*”

- “Social media has become the new PR firm of the brand Self.” **What do you think about Tony Reinke’s observation? How have you seen this in your own life or the lives of your family?**

LEADER NOTES: Another way the environment of social media can shape our heart toward Self is through our obsession with curating our image online. Today we can edit our pictures and words to tell a certain story and give a certain impression of who we are and what we are experiencing. The environment of social media encourages us to make ourselves and our lives look better/more glamorous, than they really are.

6. READ the following quote:

“When we look deeply into digital technology, we see habits, beliefs, and desires that are constantly forming us. These habits, beliefs, and desires constitute digital liturgies – ways of living that are centered on the good life.” Samuel D. James Digital Liturgies

- **What digital habits do you think are helpful in your quest to love God and people? What digital habits may be harming this quest?**

LEADER NOTES: Your group members may find this question difficult to answer because digital technology has become “the water we swim in”. Often when we think about changing digital habits we focus on limiting our time on our phone or scrolling social media. While these may be helpful, it is even better to think about how we can harness technology in a positive way, to grow our love for God and others. Encourage your group members to dream about practical ways they could do this (or to share how they are already doing this)

Book Recommends:

My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices. Amy and Andy Crouch
Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age. Samuel D. James

The Kingdom of WE:

The kingdom of WE is The Kingdom of God that Jesus taught about. This kingdom is based on a rich and thriving relationship with God and with others. Frederick Dale Bruner, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, gives some wonderful insights from Jesus' teaching in John 15 about how we can live of citizens of God's kingdom, the Kingdom of WE. Note, particularly, the invitation Jesus gives to make our Home with him and the fruit bearing that will result.

7. READ: John 15:1-7 Jesus Invites His Disciples to Make Their Home With Him.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." vs. 1 NIV

"I, I am the real Root of the Matter, and my Father is the Orchardist." (Fredrick Dale Bruner rendering)

- **What does Jesus mean by this statement, "I am the true vine". "I, I am the Root of the Matter"?**

LEADER NOTES: This is the seventh and last of Jesus' 'I-Am-with-a-predicate' sayings, and it is one of the most impressive. The prior six and their chapters have been the Bread in 6, Light in 8, Good Shepherd in 10; the combined Resurrection and Life in 11 and the combined Way, Truth and Life in 14. In saying, "*I am the real Vine,*" Jesus is as much as claiming to be the authentic Israel in person. What the root and trunk are to trees, Jesus is to human life. All human beings are looking for the root of the matter. Jesus claims to be exactly that, 'really'. Source: Fredrick Bruner Commentary on John 15

"and my Father is the gardener." vs. 1 NIV

"and my Father is the Orchardist." (Fredrick Dale Bruner rendering)

- **How does this truth impact our lives as followers of Jesus?**

LEADER NOTES: As followers of Jesus we are a part of his garden – the church. By the world's standards, the church may look obscure, powerless, irrelevant, but we have a "Good Orchardist" who knows what he is doing in his mission to reach the world. "Never was any husbandman so wise, so watchful about his vineyard as God is about his church ...". Matthew Henry Commentary.

8. READ: John 15:4 Homemaking

⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. NIV

“Make your home with me as I am with you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it makes its home with the root (and trunk), so more can you bear fruit unless you make your home with me.” (Fredrick Dale Bruner rendering)

- **“Remain (make your home with) me as I also remain with you.” What does this invitation from Jesus “make your home with me” mean to you?**

LEADER NOTES: Jesus invites us to live with him. This is the simplest meaning of our verse. Think of the honour! And Jesus adds encouragingly, “as I am (making my home) with you.” This gracious addition enhances Jesus’ invitation because it tells us that Jesus is not just a passive inviter, awaiting *our* move before he makes his; he has already made his move and therefore would very much like ours. Jesus’ grace precedes our faith once again. His love prompts ours. (see Rev. 3:20). Source: Fredrick Dale Bruner Commentary on the Gospel of John

9. READ: John 15:5 Fruitfulness Promised

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” vs. 5 NIV

“I, I Am the Root of the Matter; you disciples are the branches. The individual making a home with me (as I am with him or her) – there is a person bearing much fruit! Because the fact of the matter is this: apart from me you can do absolutely nothing.” (Fredrick Dale Bruner rendering)

- **What does it mean to “bear fruit”? How do these words encourage you about fruitfulness in your life as you follow Jesus?**

LEADER NOTES: In this verse Jesus once again reminds us of our close relationship with him in the Kingdom of WE. It is as close as a tree with its branches. He then, appealingly, *individualizes* his promise by zeroing in on the single reader/hearer as if to bring his appeal especially “home” and make it personal. We long to be fruitful and, if possible, to even be abundantly fruitful. We don’t want, however, to be caught up in the world’s successist or quantitative definitions of abundance or fruitfulness. Fidelity to an ailing or needy parent (or spouse or child or friend or neighbour or co-worker ...) is the equivalent, in Jesus’ eyes, of a stadium full of converts. The quality and quantity of each one’s fruit will be determined, definitively, only at the Judgment, where, we sense, we will be surprised by evaluations. (see Matt. 19:30, Matt. 25:21). Source: Fredrick Dale Bruner Commentary on the Gospel of John

10. Moving from the Kingdom of ME to the Kingdom of WE involves making our home with (remaining, abiding, sticking with) Jesus. As we do this, we will be fruitful as we love others and serve others in Jesus’ Name.

- **What is a key takeaway from this study for you? What next step do you sense Jesus prompting you to take?**

NOTE: For those who are interested in further insights into Bruner's comments on John 15:1-17, here are some notes. This has been a rich study for me to understand more of what it means to live as a kingdom citizen in God's Kingdom of WE. I hope it is for you as well!

The Gospel of John Commentary – Frederick Dale Bruner

John 15 – John's Son Sermon (The Homecoming)

How Disciples Learn their Home for World Missions

This chapter features Jesus eagerly seeking disciples who will make their home *with Him*.

Chapter Outline

1. Disciples are fruitful in the world by making their home with Jesus. 15:1-17
 - i. Jesus invites His disciples to make their home with Him and to pray. (1-8)
 - ii. Jesus invites His disciples to keep His love command and to pray. (9-17)

Jesus' command "love one another" is predicated on the found of Jesus' love for us (received by faith). John 15:1-17 is also a commentary on 13:1-20 for the two parts here in chapter 15 correspond to the two interpretations of the foot washing (Letting the Lord wash us = faith then our washing of one another = love). Jesus serves us therefore we can serve one another.

15:1. The Real Root of the Matter

"I, I am the real Root of the Matter, and my Father is the Orchardist."

This is the seventh and last "I-Am" with- a predicate and it is one of the most impressive. (prior six are Bread, Light, Shepgate, Good Shepherd, Resurrection and the Life, Way, Truth, Life)

The Tree that was planted on Calvary has shoots going out into all the world. William Temple

What roots and trunks are to trees, Jesus is to human life.

All human beings are looking for the root of the matter. Jesus claims to be exactly that, "really".

Vs. 2. Every branch in me that is not bearing fruit – he cuts it off. And every branch that is bearing fruit – he cuts it back (he prunes and cleanses it) so that it may bear even more fruit.

"Cuts it off" We will be cut off (Greek - *airei*), this text warns, "if we are not being real."

This particular reality is left to the conscience of the reader, to the witness of the Spirit, to the counsel of fellow disciples, and to the remainder of Jesus' present sermon (and the surrounding Gospel) to clarify and determine.

"Cuts back" (Greek – *kath-airi*). (pruned) means "cleansing, purifying, purging) Jesus told Peter, "The person who has had a bath doesn't need anything else but is *kathoros holos* "cleansed wholly" and you disciples are now *katharoi* a cleansed people.

Cutting back (pruning) seems like a painful process but even home gardeners tell us that this seemingly harsh "backward" procedure is actually good and is, indeed, "fruitful" for the plants.

Something comparably miraculous and fruitful waits on the other side of every faithful disciple's prunings and crosses.

Vs. 3 – A Cleansed People

"Already you disciples are a cleansed (cut back, purified) people because of the Word I have spoken to you."

Jesus' Word "already" as we have listened to Him, has cleansed, pruned and cut us back.

All subsequent disciples of Jesus are cleansed, 1) first of all, by Jesus' Footwashing Cross and Resurrection, and, in particular, they are cleansed when they get "Word" of these deep weekend events and of the person who experienced them for them and are divinely moved to put their trust in him. 2) We are also cleansed, publicly and officially, when the power of Jesus' Cross and Resurrection is applied to us in baptism 3) and we are re-cleansed regularly and communally whenever we hear Jesus' Word again and again within the fellowship of the Church 4) and we are re-cleansed again and again wherever his body and blood are received in I Meal, with this Meal's special gift of the assurance of their complete forgiveness of sins. 5) Finally and most existentially, disciples are cleansed by all the cutting experiences that the pruning Lord allows and brings into disciples' lives.

15:4 Homemaking

"Make your home with me as I am with you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it makes its home with the root (and trunk), no more can you bear fruit unless you make your home with me."

Greek word *menein* means "to continue with", "remain" "to stick with"

Jesus invites us to live with him. Think of the honour! And Jesus adds, encouragingly, "as I am (making my home) with you." This gracious addition enhances Jesus' invitation because it tells us that Jesus is not just a passive inviter, awaiting *our* move before he makes his; he has made his move and therefore would very much like ours.

Jesus has already turned his life toward us; would we be so kind, then, as to invite him in? Jesus' grace precedes our faith once again; his love prompts ours.

If Jesus is our home, our text is promising, almost everything else (the "fruit") will take care of itself.

How Do We Make Our Home with Jesus?

- 1) We make our home with Jesus by prayer in response to preaching (conversion). (John 1, 4). "Rabbi, where are you making your home?" (pou meneis). Jesus told them, "Come and see" and they came and saw where He was making his home (pou menei) and they made their home (emeinan) there with him that day." These first disciples responded to the message of John ("Look, the Lamb of God") and we today respond to Christ-centred preaching through prayer (talking to God honestly) and Jesus invites us home.
- 2) We make our home with Jesus in the Communion/Meal. John 6. "The person who eats my flesh and drinks my blood is making a home with me, and I am making my home with that person."
- 3) We make our home with Jesus by continuing in Jesus' Word. (John 8:31-32) "If you continue (meinete – make your home) in my Word, you will really be my disciples ...". We make our home with Jesus when we embrace his word through teaching at church, family devotions, lifegroup studies – these help us abide in Him.
- 4) We make our home with Jesus by keeping His Command of Loving One Another (John 15)

We make our home with Jesus when we want to keep his simple commands, particularly his command to love one another.

We make our home with Jesus 1) by talking with Him in prayer-conversation or in conversion responses to the proclamation of Christ's Word. 2/3 by feeding on his Word and his Meal in the communion and fellowship with our brothers and sisters and then 4) by moving out into the world in his friendship and loving one another out of the power of his friendly love for us that is already at work in us.

15:5. Fruitfulness Promised

"I, I am the Root of the Matter; you disciples are the branches. The individual making a home with me (as I am with him or her) – there is a person bearing much fruit! Because the fact of the matter is this: apart from me you can do absolutely nothing."

We long to be fruitful and, if possible, to be even abundantly fruitful. We don't want, however, to be caught up in the world's successist or quantitative definitions of abundance or fruitfulness. Fidelity to an ailing or need parent (or a spouse or child or friend or neighbour or co-worker or client or ...) is the equivalent, in Jesus' eye, of a stadium full of converts. Homemaking with Jesus, short and simple, all by itself, yields abundant fruitfulness, Jesus promises in this important verse. But the abundance can't be quantified by human measurements. The person who lives with Jesus will be helpful, through the Church and in the world, Jesus promises.

“Because the fact of the matter is this: apart from me you can do absolutely nothing.” Of course we can do all sorts of things apart from Jesus, but Jesus’ “absolutely nothing” is substantive, not mathematical, qualitative, not quantitative, lasting not ephemeral.

PRAYER: “Dear Lord, please screw our heads on right and help us to *want* to make our home with you and to be seriously aware of the dangers of not making this home.”

15:7. A Deep Conversational Promise

“But if you disciples make your home with me, and if my Words can find a home in you, well then, whatever you *want*, just ask for it and it’s yours!”

A major way Jesus makes his home with his disciples is when *his conversation - his words* - can find listening friends, can find “a home” where these words will be taken seriously, listened to expectantly, and responded to honestly.

Then these listeners, in turn, Jesus promises, can talk with Jesus about not just “whatever” but more practically about what he has just said to us, and then we can talk to Jesus about “whatever *you want*”. And then Jesus, from his side, promises to listen to these close conversational partners, to his listening and asking friends, to this his family with whom he is in very personal touch and at home, and to be respond to them by giving them exactly what they want: “just ask for it and it’s yours!”

Life at home with Jesus will teach us to be sensible in the “whatevers” or “whatever we wants” that we ask – as Jesus’ words find a home in our heart. Husbands and wives will be thoughtful in their requests of one another. Disciples will be thoughtful in their requests of the Lord.

Jesus wants his disciples to think bravely and even miraculously of their whatevers and wants.

Jesus Invites His Disciples to Keep His Love Command and to Pray (15:9-17)

“It is not that we keep His commands first, and then He loves us; but that He loves us, and the we keep His commands”. Augustine

15:9. Love’s Range

“Just as much as the Father has loved me – there! That is how much I have loved you. Make your home in this special love of mine (and relax).”

Jesus invites us to make ourselves at home in his love for us, which is love that is just as large as his Father’s love for him. This fact should overwhelm us – to the point that we can relax a bit in our new home when we think of our Homemaker.

Out of this huge well of divine love we can draw the love we need as we move out with much tinier containers into a love-starved world.

15:10. Command Keeping Love

“When you (*want to*) keep my commands, you will be making your home in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and am making my home in his love.”

When we believe that Jesus has already “done” everything necessary to put us into right relation with the Lord then we can relax a bit and believe that our *wanting* to keep Jesus’ commands is a workable way our faith in Jesus can express itself outwardly in love.

Jesus wants us to know (and so to relax in) our deep belovedness, a belovedness as deep as the Father’s extravagant love for his own Son, and that is a very, very deep love indeed. We will make our home in – relax in – this almost incredible love when we keep Jesus’ twofold command in chapters 13 and 14 – to *trust* him (to let *him* wash *our* feet first) and then to have a heart for one another (in grateful response to his heartfelt washing of us to wash one another with heart).

BREATHE IN (trust God’s love for you) and BREATHE OUT (live his command to love)

Real love (let us admit it) does not come easily. The inhaling of an undeserved divine love for ourselves (received by a usually hesitating but still eager trust) and the exhaling of our all-too-human but still well intended love for others – this is the breathing exercise that all disciples try (train) to practice every day. Trust (breathe in); and have-a-heart (breathe out).

15:11 The Fullness of Joy

“I have said (all) these things to you so that my very special joy can be right there in the midst of your community and so that your own personal joy can be filled to overflowing.”

Jesus clearly believes that his commands of homemaking with him and of command-keeping under him will give his disciples the deepest experience of “my very special joy”. The unique need for joy that each of us has will find maximum satisfaction when we are wanting to make our home with Jesus and wanting to keep his commands.

15:12-14. The Heart Command from the Commander Friend

“Here is my very special command; that you have a heart for one another- out of the resource of my heart for you. There is no greater love than this; giving one’s life for one’s friends. Well, you disciples are my friends when you are doing the things I am commanding you.”

Jesus’ great command to his disciples in the Gospel of John, after his root command to trust him, is to have a heart for those around us. We have been and are being loved: out of this deep living resource – love! Pass on the same undeserved love you are experiencing in yourself from Jesus to the (perhaps) undeserving but hurting people around you.

15:15. The Apostolic Friendship

“I am not going to call you servants anymore, because the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have decided to call you friends because everything I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

The disciple's present graduation from servanthood to friendship is by sheer grace. What had the disciples done to deserve this promotion except hang around? And rather soon this Weekend they will turn tail. Nevertheless this upgrade. We readers will want to become good friends with these canonical apostles in order to be as close as possible to their unique Friend as well.

15:16 The Mission

"It wasn't you who chose me. Oh no, it was I who chose you and appointed you to move out and bear fruit, fruit that lasts .. so that whatever you asked the Father in my name I would give to you."

We must not forget where we came from. And to be chosen by Jesus – no little privilege! – is immediately to be appointed by him to a task. We "move out" (Matthew 28 – Great Commission) to bear fruit that will last – what you do for the kingdom will help people in lasting ways.

Harness Technology for the Good of the Kingdom!

PRAYER

- 1) Help us appreciate your being the real Root of the Matter (vs. 1)
- 2) Help us to bear fruit and to bear the cutting back this will often mean (vs. 2)
- 3) Help us appreciate your Ward that cleansed and keeps cleansing us. (vs. 3)
- 4) Help us accept your invitation to make our home with you. (vs. 4)
- 5) Help us to stick with you (vs. 5)
- 6) Help us to take to heart the dangers of not sticking with you. (vs. 6)
- 7) Help us to let your words make such a home in us that we will ask thoughtful "whatevers" in prayer. (vs. 7)
- 8) Help us to bear fruit that lasts to bring glory to the Father (vs. 8)

15:17. Recapitulation

"This (in sum) is what I am commanding you; Have a heart for one another!"

Jesus does not tire of reminding us that the main fruit he wants in every disciple is *heart* for people around us, heart for people given to us. The main thing Jesus wants *from* us (as the fruit of the main thing he wants *in* us – which is repeatedly, to trust him) is to have a heart for the people given *to* us.

