



# abcLinks

connecting personal and small group studies with this week's sermon

For the sermon on August 8-9, 2009

## this week's coreverse

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

John 13.34-35

## usingabclinks

### Personal Bible Studies (inside pages)

- Personal studies that explore Scripture passages related to this week's sermon. They are broken down into three or four days. Some days you will simply read, meditate or think about a passage of scripture. Other days you will be asked to dig into a passage through reading, studying, answering questions.

### Small Group Discussion (back page)

- Small group questions that connect with the sermon and your personal Bible study. This series of questions act as a funnel to help your group discussion flow in a purposeful point.
- If you are not in a small group, contact one of our small group staff members to get more information on ABC Small Groups or go to [adabile.org](http://adabile.org)>small groups.

See [adabile.org](http://adabile.org)>message recaps & Links for ABCLinks archives.



## Part Three of a Five Part Sermon Series

### "The Window of Community"

It was an awkward feeling to be sitting on the couch. Dan sat in a chair across from me, arms crossed, with a finger thoughtfully on his chin. "So Phil, what brought you to the point to give me a call? Why are you here?" Dan and I went to Bible college together 25 years ago; since then he developed a private counseling practice and I found my way into church ministry. For years, I've recommended Dan to people who needed care and counsel. Now, I needed Dan to do some work on me. I've trusted him with others, now I needed to trust him with my care.

"I'm weary and I'm lonely," I said. That was the most concise way of expressing the recent struggle that had been brewing in my spirit over the past year. The weary thing—that wasn't tough to say, church ministry can have tough stretches that simply wear you out. My family life was going through some new transitions that were wearing on me as well. To be tired ... not a surprise. But, lonely ... that confused me. I'm a small group junkie. I not only lead the charge for small group community at Ada Bible Church, I also practice it. I'm involved with three great groups plus I lead a staff of people I enjoy and call friends. I'm with people constantly—great people, mature and growing people, people I love to be with. How could I feel lonely? It was tough enough to be on the couch as a pastor asking for help; it was really tough to be on the couch as a small group pastor admitting feeling alone in the world.

Over the course of seven sessions, Dan helped me unearth a handful of issues in my life that I had archived to the back of the file cabinet of my soul. Dan went after my depth of community. He challenged me with my willingness to be truly known. "Who really knows you, Phil? Who do you share your fears, confessions, and struggles with?" You would think my list would be long, but it wasn't. I rattled off a handful of excuses of why I had been holding back but Dan narrowed down all my excuses to a simple lack of trust. I was not trusting my community of friends with my care.

So, I made some changes. But I did it gradually, not dumping my innermost thoughts on everyone. I began to put out some "feelers" to friends, asking them to pray for me as I worked through my journey in counseling. I didn't give too much detail but waited to see who responded and who wanted to enter into that side of my world. They would be ones I could begin to trust with some intimate details. The result of this is that I still have the same wonderful friends. The difference is that I've opened my heart more to a few and they've responded with care for my soul. I've learned (again) that community is like that. It can be broad, fun and filled with friends, but true community must also be filled with a few who are more than friends, they are the care-takers of your soul. We need to be honest. We need to be known. We need to be loved. That's community.



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# personal bible studies

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Imagine you come to an old house. From the outside, you can tell it has some tremendous character and history. But it's a tad rundown and unkempt. As you walk up the driveway, you see that the trees and bushes are overgrown, hiding the beautiful windows that once brought light and fresh air to the inside. Dark and dreary is what you feel in the room as you step through the door. Smells of mustiness and mold are made more potent by the humidity in the room. Light and fresh air are what the place needs first and foremost.

You grab some tools and attempt to pry open the shutters, only to realize that the windows have been painted shut. It takes a lot of effort to free the windows from the caked paint. When the windows are hoisted open, you feel the light burst on your face and you smell the freshness of the outdoor air replace the musty, mildew stench. The building now has hope. Life is returning.

How we view and relate to people can become stuffy and stale. You may ask from time to time, "why aren't my relationships working? Why do people continue to disappoint me?" If so, don't fret. It happens to most Jesus-followers from time to time. Our study explores Jesus's relationships with his disciples. Two of his close followers disappointed him in a severe way. We need to do the hard work of prying open those windows of community so God can bring in light and air to our relationships with him. This week, we'll explore some passages that may help you get those sticky windows open.

## Part One | The Back Story

The night before Jesus was crucified he gave his disciples an important directive. He said, "*a new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*" (*John 13.34*) What a great command! But what makes this such a powerful statement is what Jesus said just prior to this command. Jesus had just acknowledged that two of his followers would fail him miserably.

Before this tension-filled conversation began, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Foot washing was a necessary act in that era (the streets were dirt and the animals weren't in pens—you do the math). But, it was also something done by servants, not teachers, not rabbis, and certainly not a messiah/king. Jesus was demonstrating his love for his disciples. He would lay down his dignity for their comfort.

*Read John 13.18-26.*

If you were in the room that day, what swings in emotions would you be feeling as these events and conversations were taking place? What would be your primary emotion?

Why do you think Jesus offered his new command to love each other as he loved them at this time and in this setting?

Think about Jesus's choices for his twelve key followers. These were not people at the top of the social heap. They were not the best of the best. Yet Jesus, over and over, expresses his love for these men and implores them to love each other. He is building community among them and with them.

Jesus formed community with a group of flawed people. Two would turn their backs on him. How does this impact your view of Christian community?

## Part Two | The Problem with Community

Often we encourage people to join a small group or a ministry with the promise that they will find great friends, a sense of connection, and a place to find care. Yes, these are great reasons to join a group or ministry; however, Jesus's community of disciples illustrates that every community of believers has flaws. Entering into healthy community is often difficult to do. There are often objections that we put forward hoping they'll excuse us from community. Spend some time thinking about the following:

*I know that as a follower of Jesus, I need to have community in my life. I know that community requires me to open up and share my life with people. I'm afraid that if I open up, I'll get hurt. I'd rather not risk that.*

How would you respond to this person?

*I know that as a follower of Jesus, I need to have community in my life. I know that community requires a time investment, but my life is so full already.*

How would you respond to this person?

*I know that as a follower of Jesus, I need to have community in my life. I know that community requires that I make a relational investment in people. I'm afraid I'll get stuck with people who are nothing like me or who are weird.*

How would you respond to this person?

*I know that as a follower of Jesus, I need to have community in my life. Okay I'm in, but I'm going to be guarded. I'm in for the fun and social end of community. I'm not sure I'm going very deep with this group of people. I'm not sure I can trust them.*

How would you respond to this person?

Have you ever used any of these objections to meaningful community? Have you used any others? Did you break through? How?

What are the dangers of giving into these objections? What sort of life will you be left to live?



# small group discussion

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## leanin

Who was your best friend in college? What made that person the “best” of your friends?

## lookdown

Read together John 13.1-26.

Describe the scene from the perspective of one of the disciples (for instance Nathaniel.) What was the tone in the room? How did the mood change over the course of the evening, especially when Jesus talked about someone betraying him and someone denying him?

Why do you think Jesus gave the “new” command (vs 34-35) at this time and place? What was the purpose? Why was his timing significant?

## lookout

Review the objections for entering into community on the previous page. Which ones do you hear most? Have you ever used one of these? What others can you think of? Are these valid objections? Tell why or why not.

## lookin

One of the ways to ensure that your small group is a safe place for people to share is to have a covenant with one another. A covenant is a mutual agreement of how the group will function. A covenant needs to be reviewed periodically to remind each other of its importance. Below is a sample. Feel free to edit, rewrite, and adapt it for your group. Take this time as a small group to review your covenant with each other.

### **Relationships**

We commit to investing in each other, building healthy life-giving friendships with one another.

### **Authenticity**

We commit to creating an atmosphere that encourages openness and transparency among members.

### **Confidentiality**

We commit to keep confidential what is said in the small group, never gossiping or repeating things to people outside the group.

### **Respect**

We commit to using words of encouragement, affirmation, and respect as we challenge each other toward spiritual growth.

### **Priority and Availability**

We commit to giving time and priority to the group, being available for group time and to meeting each other’s needs.

### **Preparation and Participation**

We commit to preparing for each group meeting by doing the studies during the week and by praying for everyone regularly.