

September 17, 2023



How

Every Life Has a Story – If We Bother to Read it

Acts 2:42

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

1 Peter 4:8-9

⁸ Above all else, love one another deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil – but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It always protects. always trusts. always hopes. always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

Summary:

How do we welcome folks into our homes; lives; hearts; churches? Today's talk fusses with that and helps us examine how welcoming we really are and explores ways we might be able to do that better while building biblical community.

Ice Breaker Questions:

1. If you've got first-time guests coming over to your home – what's the first thing you **think about** in getting ready? What's the first thing you **do** to get ready?
2. Describe a time you went somewhere new (restaurant, park, church, someone's home, etc.). What are the things you remember? What were your first impressions?
3. Share a time you were loved unconditionally – with divine love; agape love; God's love?

Scripture Study Questions:

1. One of our charges as a Class/Small Group is to regularly lift up the four pillars of the early church: Apostles' teaching; Fellowship, Breaking of Bread; Prayer. (Acts 2:42). Which of these pillars in our group/class is easiest to dismiss or avoid? Why? Which is easiest to do? Why?
2. In your own words describe the Apostles' teaching (interactions the Apostles had with Jesus – the God stories) that Peter might have shared with the early church. What do you think was most important for Peter to share? What was difficult for him to share? How about the stories that Matthew/Levi – the tax collector might have shared?
3. Why do you think Peter wrote 1 Peter 4:8-9? What sidebar stories might he have shared with these verses?
4. In St. Paul's description of love (1 Cor. 13:4-8), who in your life has best fit this definition of love? What did you learn from them?
5. In thinking about your closest relationships - which one of these love descriptions is toughest for you to follow? Which is easiest? How might you improve on the one(s) you need work on?

Application Questions:

1. **"Everyone has a story!"** Share a time when you really listened to someone's story? What did you learn about that person that surprised you? As they were sharing their story – what did you learn about yourself? How hard was it for you not to interject your story?
2. **"Be kind – Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about."** Share a time when you judged someone one way – and then when you found out their story (their battle) your view of them changed dramatically?
3. **"Above all else – love one another deeply."** Who in your life do you love the deepest? Who in your life right now is most difficult to love? Why? How does "love cover over a multitude of sins?" Who right now are you needing to love and forgive?
4. The two questions frequently asked by our guests: **1. Is it safe? 2. Are there people here that look like me?** Were these your questions when you came to our church? Someone's home for the first time? A new store or restaurant? Share experiences when you did and didn't feel safe visiting someplace new? Share experiences when you felt like you were with your people, or you felt like an outsider?
5. **How welcoming do you think we are at South Sub Church?** See top 10 reasons why folks do or don't come back to a church! How can you personally help us be better about welcoming folks?
6. How can the group **pray** for you?

Top 10 Reasons Why folks don't return:

1. Stand & Greet Time

6 out of 10 members don't like it!

9 out of 10 guests don't like it.

"Greeting seemed artificial or contrived."

"Friendliness only during Stand & Greet time – does more harm than good!"

2. Unfriendly Church Members

- Holy Huddles
- Inward Focused

Folks talking to folks they know without acknowledging the people they don't know.

Vast majority of guests feel like they are intruding on a party to which they weren't invited – or sneaking into someone else's family reunion.

3. Unsafe and Unclean Children's Areas

4. No place to get information on the church

- No Welcome Center
- Couldn't find the Welcome Center
- Unmanned Welcome Center

5. Poor Church Web Site

- Outdated Information
- Wrong service times

6. Poor Signage

- If you've been at a church more than a few weeks, you don't see the signs.
- First time guests do!

7. Insider Language/Secret Handshakes

8. Boring or Bad Church Services (Note this is way down the list)

9. "You're in my seat!"

10. Dirty facilities

- A dirty church says to guests "We don't really care."

Top 10 Reasons Why folks come back:

1. "Someone asked me to sit with them."

2. People introduced themselves to the guests.

- Didn't feel contrived or routine

3. There was clear signage.

- Both Inside and outside

4. Clearly marked Welcome Center

- A place to ask questions
- Pick up church information
- Is there something for me here?

5. "My kids loved the Children's Area!"

6. "Kids area felt secure and sanitary!"

7. "Guest parking was clearly visible!"

8. No fake "Stand & Greet" time!

9. "Members were welcoming and not pushy!"

10. "The Guest/Connect Card was simple to complete!"