

Bunkmates in the Infirmary

I John 4:12

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(GA) Growing up, I had a favorite uncle, Scott. Scott was married to my mom's sister. Man, he was so much fun.

A. He lived in Kansas City, and we'd visit him about once a month. Wherever Scott was, that's where the party was...

A. He's the one that introduced me to Gates BBQ, World's of Fun, and Royals Baseball. In fact, whenever we went to a Royal's game, he'd get me signatures of the players after the game.

1. One night, Scott said, "Hey, why don't you guys wait in the car... I'll take Zeke and we'll be back in about 30 minutes. He took me back to this remote area of the parking lot, and he struck a conversation with this young lady. Scott knew that this was where the player's wives waited.

a. Anyway, Scott could make friends with anyone... and in about ten minutes, as he and this woman were laughing and talking, George Brett walks up and this young woman, kisses her, and she says, I'm not exaggerating at all, she says, "Hey honey, I'd like you to meet a friend of mine... this is Scott, and his nephew, Zeke."

i. I went home with a baseball autographed by George Brett, the year was 1985... which, if you know Royals' history, you know that's the ONLY year they were any good. George went on to help them win the World Series that year.

a. But that was just Scott, he did things like that all the time, he was great!

B. Apparently, I didn't know it at the time, but when I was in 10th grade Scott started coming down with headaches. At first, he'd get one or two a week... then he started getting them every day.

1. His wife kept telling him to go to the doctor... but he didn't want to. She kept on him... and Scott kept saying "no"... he finally went...

a. The doctor found a brain tumor... a bad one.

2. And I'll never forget Scott's response when he told our family that he had a brain tumor – he was upset that he went to the doctor.

a. Almost as if going to the doctor is what made his life worse now.

C. Now, that doesn't make sense... and that's ok, that was Scott's way of handling the shock. Who knows how you or I would handle news like that, right, at 34 years of age.

1. I think back on it – and I think Scott must have known that going to the doctor would reveal something... and force him to deal with it head on.

a. So, his instinct was to avoid the doctor's office... and I can avoid the pain and mess and problems.

(SN) I think this is how many people view getting into authentic relationships with people in our church.

A. They look ahead and predict that potential pain, and mess, and problems that could surface from deep, authentic relationships... so they figure out ways to not go there! Ways to keep *just enough* distance. Just like Scott, they think: "No way... I'm not getting into that!"

1. And a part of me thinks, who am I to blame them. Who hasn't been burned by "going deep" with others.

B. At times it can seem just flat out *easier* to keep a distance from other people. Isn't it cleaner, simpler, to have superficial relationships?

1. That way other people's mud doesn't get on us; their sins, pains, clumsy little mistakes, the annoying parts of their personalities. I call that stuff our "mudd".

a. We think, "If we live in superficial, come to church, shake a few hands and only have those 'Wow, what great weather we're having talks,' we keep other people's mud away from us."

2. And, we keep others from surfacing *our* mud, either. Pointing out or bringing out our sins, pains, mistakes, or annoying parts of our personalities.

a. Now, *of course*, I don't have mud. ☺ My personality even annoys myself, at times.

C. We all have mud... so wouldn't it be easier to just continue to live in shallow, superficial relationships?

1. That way we're all called upon less to help... or to be a listening ear... or to loan things, or give things... it's just easier!

D. It might be easier in many ways to avoid deep, authentic relationships with our spiritual community...

1. But that easier path comes at a pretty high cost. The high cost is this: your experience of God and His perfect love.

(S) Let me show you this in Scripture. Turn with me to *I John 4:12*. Let me read this verse to you... but I want to do something different. I'm going to read it to you in three different versions of the Bible – just help us listen, let John's idea sink in. Just listen:

A. (Read in six versions:)

1. "No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us – perfect love!" (The Message)

2. "No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us." (Living Translation)

3. (Our ESV Version) "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

B. The first thing we should catch is the idea that "No one has ever seen God." The one person who had the courage to ask to see God was Moses. And God said back to him: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

1. This wasn't a mean answer... God wasn't being reclusive... in fact, God was being kind to Moses. He was protecting Moses' life. God's image, is so pure, so radiant, that if a human were to look directly upon it – he'd melt, or combust, or I don't know what... but they wouldn't come out of it alive.

a. God did let Moses experience, not *see*, but *experience* God's glory, not God's *face* or *image*. The Hebrew word for glory used in this passage with Moses is "**kabowd**" and it refers to the full sum of all God's goodness and sovereignty.

i. So Moses was granted a cool experience. But to do that, even just experience, *not see*, God's glory, *not His face*, God had to wedge Moses between two rocks and cover his eyes... just so Moses didn't melt, or combust, or whatever.

a) What does that tell you about God?

a) It tells me that He is so pure and holy that He radiates a light and heat too powerful for human existence. So, out of God's love, John writes, "No one has ever seen God."

C. But, here's the cool thing, John tells us that this God – whose face cannot be revealed – this God reveals Himself today, **when His people love each other well.**

1. If we love each other well, the God of all Creation who had to keep Himself hidden is now seen by us, through how we love each other.

a. What Moses had to be crammed between boulders to experience a glimpse of, we now experience in each other when we love well.

i. This must be the Scripture that CS Lewis was celebrating when he writes, "Men are 'mirrors, or carriers of Christ to other men.'"

2. When we love each other well, God continually reveals Himself to us, His people.

D. But even more than that happens when we love one another well. Look at the last thing John says happens when we love each other well: "...God's love is perfected in us."

1. Wait a minute – I thought God was perfect... I thought God's attributes, including His love, were fully perfect and lacking nothing. What could John possibly mean that when we love each other, God's love is perfected in us?"

a. What I believe John is saying here, is this:

i. God is love and His love originated with Himself.

ii. Then He created us out of love toward us.

iii. Then He sent His Son to perfectly display the love of God – remember, there's no greater love than this, a brother lays down his life for another... and Jesus did this for us.

iv. But, and here's where John's statement makes sense, Jesus' died to not only display God's love... but to enable us, God's people, to love one another perfectly, as Jesus loved perfectly.

2. God's love is perfect and complete. Jesus' love is perfect and complete. Let me ask, Is ours toward each other perfect and complete with God's love?

a. **It can be...** that's precisely John's point. We **can perfect and complete** the love of God – the love God is... the love Jesus displayed... the love Jesus makes possible for us to carry out, or perfect.

i. We can love with the love of God, perfecting the gift Jesus gave us, enabling us to love well like this.

b. Part of what the cross did... what the Holy Spirit does... is make it possible for God's people to love perfectly with His love.

(VR) We can perfect and complete the love of God...

A. But this community thing is just so, so hard.

1. John Eldredge says that living in community is like camping together, all of us. For a month. In the desert. Without tents. All your stuff is scattered out there for everyone to see.

B. That's authentic community, and it's hard! I don't think there's anything wrong admitting that loving each other in the way that completes God's love will be difficult.

1. Best case scenario, it's messy, frustrating at times, it's inconvenient.

a. But think about it this way – when we pull out, we miss experiencing the love of God, the love of people, the things that are true and eternal in this life.

i. I've got people in my life who aren't experiencing the love of God through others... it's an empty existence... and some go to church.

a) When you opt out of biblical community, you lose big.

b. When we opt in, we're tested and tried, but we experience God's love through each other... and that, that is the only thing in this life of pain and hurt that keeps us alive... and hopeful... and prepared for eternity.

2. So, you can pull out... avoid authentic, spiritual community like Scott wanted to avoid the doctor...

3. Or, you can enter in... and experience life, and joy, and the love and presence of God...

C. I never finished the story with Scott – Scott did go to the doctor, and the doctor found a massive tumor, that much I'd told you.

1. What I didn't tell you was that tumor was so large, and so aggressive, that Scott would have likely been dead in three months had he not gone to the doctor...

2. But he did go to the doctor, and the doctor took Scott through a war against that cancer and Scott lived four wonderful difficult, but wonderful years...

a. In fact, he had been cancer-free for so long that we all threw him a huge party at Gate's BBQ four years after his diagnosis to celebrate.

i. Two weeks later, he got another headache and this time the cancer won the battle in a couple months.

D. I think Scott's experience is a good metaphor for this John's point. Scott went to the doctor and it saved his life... not without a fight – it took everything Scott had to fight and win against cancer for four years.

1. If you take God's challenge and pour yourself deeply & authentically into your spiritual community... it'll save your life – it is the way to see and experience deeply God and His love deeply.

a. Will it be hard? It will be a fight; a war that at times will call for everything you've got to give in order to fight and win and push on to **love and be loved**.

2. Scott's situation is also a good metaphor because Scott was eventually able to stop fighting. Scott died and left the battlefield. The fight was over.

a. Friends, the hard parts of living in community – living with each other's mud - will be over someday. We'll still be together, but the battle to love and be loved well will be over. Love will happen easily & perfectly.

i. For many of those we love, it's already over... it's now pure bliss and enjoyment. Jesus calls it "paradise" in Luke 23.

a) For those in Christ who have gone before us, they're experiencing intimacy, authenticity, and all the joys of relationships... without the problems of camping together.

(A) Part of what it means that Heartland is a Hospital, is that we live side-by-side – as bunkmates – in this world of pain and hurt.

A. And you can lay around in bed – staring at your toes, thinking only of yourself – waiting for someone to float down from heaven, wearing the big lab coat in the sky, and love and heal and fix your problems...

1. Or, you can realize that many of the things the Great Physician wants to do in the life of the person on the bunk, or hospital bed, next to you... He wants to do through you.

a. This is what it means to be the "Body of Christ" – we're the hands, feet, and heart of the Great Physician and He expects us to do His work of loving well.

B. What does this look like? I wrestled with this question, and felt like there are four challenges worth mentioning:

1. Some of us haven't given all of ourselves to the Body of Christ and it's evident in our attendance on Sundays. Coming into this room and loving the entire body of Christ is a low priority for a you, perhaps...
 - a. Perhaps how you can jump in and love well, love better, is by committing to being here, in the Sanctuary, with those who need you, every Sunday that you can...
 2. For some of you, though, this isn't your challenge. Perhaps your challenge is to decide to have conversations that go beyond how the Huskers played... or how much rain we got.
 - a. For some of you, the way you can love better, with more vulnerability and risk, is by talking with a few other people what's really going on with you...
 - i. What is really happening in your heart, or marriage, or in your room late at night when the doors are closed and nobody's around...
 - a) For some of you, having honest, authentic conversations is the place you can love better.
 3. For some of you, perhaps you could love better by what you contribute to this community. When we take an offering on Sundays, we take those monies and disperse them so that bills are paid... ministries are funded... children's materials are purchased... ...so that missionaries are supported... so that as a family we can carry out God's vision for our church together! Together!
 - a. Some of you are taking from the church – from the vision, from the ministries – your receiving, but you're not contributing. You're not loving the community very well by what you're giving.
 - i. You've heard my thoughts on money – I preached an entire series on this issue – you know that I know that the Bible teaches that giving is a matter of the heart – but, that's my point, for some of you, on a heart-level, you're not loving the rest of us very well...
 - a) For some of you, your challenge to complete the love of God in Heartland's community involves deciding to fully participate in helping meet the needs and pay the bills and fund the ministries of this, *your*, church.
 4. The last challenge for some of us has to do with getting together. Meeting together in smaller groups for prayer, fellowship, meals, laughing, singing songs and hymns... whatever...
 - a. I know we're all busy... I know the last thing that sounds good is to add yet one more thing to our schedules... so let me frame the challenge like this – cut out two things to add this one in.
 - i. It is impossible to meet your fellowship and discipleship needs on Sunday morning – we all need a smaller group of believers to really know us well... and this can look a thousand different ways.
 - a) But for some of us, we need to love better by making time to join a small group, or start a small group, and go deep with a handful of brothers and sisters in Christ.
- C. It's impossible for me to suggest all the ways God might have each of us love each other better. All the ways that God would have us “perfect” or “complete” the love of God in our community.
1. But that's the awesome thing about our God – I know He'll lead and direct each of us. His Word NEVER returns empty, or back to Him without accomplishing it's purposes.
 - a. I know God will help us each know how we can love well and deeply our brothers and sisters in Christ.

i. So, let me pray and ask Him to do this.

Hebrews 10:25