

LOVE OUTSTRETCHED, PHIL 1:12-30

40 Days of Community #2

◆ **Intro:** It was Sept of 1985. The *Times-Reporter* of New Philadelphia, OH reported a celebration at a New Orleans municipal pool. A party around the pool was held to celebrate the first summer in memory without a drowning at any New Orleans city pool. In honor of the occasion 200 people gathered, including 100 certified lifeguards. As the party was breaking up, the four lifeguards on duty that night began to clear the pool. They found a fully dressed body in the deep end. They tried to revive Jerome Moody, 31, but it was too late. Moody had drowned surrounded by lifeguards celebrating their successful season. The irony is tragic.

◆ Wouldn't it be equally tragic for churches that celebrate salvation through the love of Jesus every week, who's sins are repeatedly forgiven by their Lord, who hold 40 Day campaigns to encourage their members to swim in the goodness of God –to not notice the people all around them who are drowning in hurt, loneliness, and are without a future hope?

◆ **1. One of our purposes as a Church community on this earth is to reach out to people outside our community with God's love.** To express it to people we don't know, and who don't know that it exists. If you are in a Life Group working through this study you have already been challenged in this regard, on an individual level, in the church, and into the community. I know of some exciting ideas already in the works. Let's look at the biblical example.

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◆A. Can you see that in Paul? Here's a man that knows what's coming. In his other letters he speaks of being granted a vision of heaven, and glimpsing unimaginable wonders he couldn't even put words around! He knows where his life, and his death for that matter, is headed and he can't wait! And so do we, don't we? We know Jesus' promises of paradise to those who trust in him. We know of his promises of welcome into eternal dwellings, to places prepared by our Father God, specifically for us. We know that our eternal destiny is secure through Christ, and that we will walk with him on white shores, where we lose all fear and dread, and tear. It looks more inviting with every passing year of heartache, and disgrace, and tragedy we experience in this life.

◆To imagine News stations that are constantly holding before us *good* news! Instead of "another man was shot on the north side last night", something like "another little girl was born today on the north side..."

◆Oh to get up and live through the entire day, without temptation, without division, hatred, fear, our constant urges to do and say things that only make our lives worse in the end.

◆All this, and Paul has actually seen a piece of it! His heart must pound in his chest just to think of it! Yet he is no escapist. We might hide in our comfortable cottages and behind our big screens, but certainly not Paul. When you think of it, not Christ!

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Christ gave up the royal comfort of heaven to come to our block to witness! And this is what he taught us as well.

◆ *"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."* John 17:14-18, NIV.

◆ We Christians are not content to run off to heaven. And we cannot be content to keep the love we know to ourselves. No. Like our Master, we have bolted heavy chains to the earth, intent on dragging it with us to where earth and heaven meet. We are out to transform humanity! We will share. We will give. We will speak. We will even suffer (v27-29).

◆ Do you recall the 5 basic biblical purposes? Membership, Maturity, Ministry, Mission, Magnification. Or, fellowship, discipleship, service, evangelism, worship. Which of those will we also do in heaven? Fellowship? Surely! Discipleship? Of course, there will always be more to learn about our God and his ways. Service? How could we not serve, it is the nature of love! Worship of God? Certainly we will participate in that. Evangelism? No longer necessary is it? Everyone in the universe will know the truth of the Triune God when he comes!

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◆ *"No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* Jeremiah 31:34, NIV.

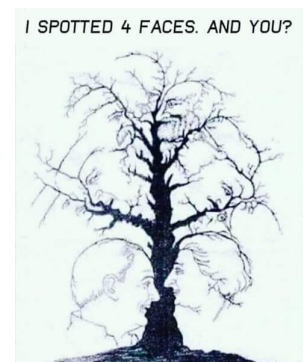
◆ **B.** See, the one purpose of the Church on earth that will not exist in heaven is evangelism. That means the church on earth fulfills that calling here. That means we Christians are not here to be served, but to serve in Jesus name. We are commissioned to go, to reach.

◆ **2. Reaching out is always better together.** When we stretch out God's love with each other, there is an added power. It is not ours. It is the Holy Spirit's.

◆ **A.** Do you know what synergy is? It's literally two greek words: together, and energy. Synergy is energy together with others. In the science world it refers to the fact the energy of the whole is greater than the mere sum of the parts. For example: if one horse can pull 2 tons, 2 horses might pull 4 tons. But in reality, pulling together they can exceed 4 tons. That's synergy. The Bible says the same thing.

◆ *Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. (Ecclesiastes 4:9, NLT).*

◆ Take a look at this picture of a tree. How many of you see a face somewhere? How many can find



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4? Anyone see 10? More people means more sights and observations. There is always more return in community than in independence. There is more authority in a home when Dad is questioned by his son about eating some more Halloween candy, and he asks, "What did your *mother* say when you asked her?" In a home where a child can pit one parent against the other, you will find disaster. It's difficult to point the world to God and his ways all alone. It's flat out difficult to stay strong in your faith alone. It's a lot easier to glow when you are in the fire.

◆ It's easy to believe the lies of the evil one when your day goes poorly, and you start to think God doesn't care about you, or maybe isn't real after all. But then someone calls and says, "I was praying and your name came to mind. How are you doing?" And your spirit's strength comes back, doesn't it?

◆ Ok, let's look at Paul's situation in Philippians 1. "*Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*"

Philippians 1:14, NIV. Here's something strange. They observe Paul's imprisonment, his jailing, his mistreatment in a prison, and instead of running, or hiding, or making sure no one finds out what they believe in, they are emboldened! "Hey, look at Paul. Look at him taking it. God must be working in him! This gospel IS worth it!" Community with Paul made other servants in Caesar's palace braver.

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◆ You've heard of Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Peter Fleming, Ed McCully, and Roger Youderian, missionaries murdered upon making contact with the Auca Indians of Ecuador, in the 60's. It made headlines for weeks. How do you think that affected the numbers of young people interested in mission work? Numbers dropped right? Wrong. The American Missionary Society was flooded with volunteers. You see, it is in the conviction of each other that we see the reality of God! The wives of those men went anyway and converted the whole tribe in the end. What makes people willing to suffer for other peoples' hope when there are plenty of easier paths to take? Love outstretched.

◆ v25 What did that simple word "remain" mean? It meant Paul would stay in this life. It meant he would not retire and disappear to a beach. It meant he would die later in that Roman prison -and it was OK by him so he could keep serving the faith needs of others.

◆ **Conclusion:** So here's what we're going to do today. I'm going to close this message off. Since God operates in his world through the hands and feet of his own covenant people, we're going to do a little brain-storming as a whole body. Our next public holiday is Halloween, so here is your challenge: take a sticky note and for the next 10 minutes, dream. Dream of a way we as a whole church could do something in our community on or

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around All Saints Eve to demonstrate God's love. Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to give you an idea, or show you a vision of some possibility. Try to contribute just one idea! Feel free to move around, confer, whatever. Imagine what could come out of all of us together. (There are a few ideas up there to get you thinking.)

◆ When you are ready, put your idea/sticky note on a poster on the walls. Then after service and for the next few weeks hover around, read the ideas, put a checkmark as a vote by all the ones you really like. That way, we'll be deciding as a whole what we want to try. We could even come up with a cool name like Operation Outstretched or something.

◆ Remember, this is in addition to your Life Group idea.

We're aiming at a whole church body function! The point is simple: give or serve in some way to demonstrate God's love and try to point to God in the process. It really doesn't matter how people respond. Love them anyway. When you hear the Praise Team start up, it'll be time to close the dream time off with our final song.