I gotta start with a question - who here likes the Avengers? Who's your favorite Avenger? [get answers]

I'm torn - my favorite is either Hulk or Iron Man (I go back and forth). I realized something when I was watching *Age of Ultron* (how many of you have seen that one yet?): I like the Avengers movies way more than I like the individual movies. I would rather see all the heroes together than see *just* Iron Man or *just* the Hulk.

When I realized that, it made me stop and think. Because if I'm being honest, I really like to surround myself with people who are just like me. Sort of like Dr. Feinstein, I wish I could make my friends in my own image, so they were just the kinds of people I like.

How cool would it be if we could make our parents be however we wanted? What about our brothers and sisters? Our friends?

I think if most of us were honest, we'd admit if we could actually make Dr. Feinstein's experiment work we would - we would *love* to remove the parts of our friends we don't like and make them just the way we want. We'd fight a lot less, because we'd always get our way.

Even the Avengers fight - they don't always see eye to eye.

But isn't it strange that we don't like the Avengers as much on their own? And we don't *want* a movie of all Iron Man or all Thors or all Black Widow. We like the whole team.

That's the big secret - we actually *need* people we don't agree with. If everyone in the world was just like us, it wouldn't be *good*. That's hard to believe, but it's exactly what the Bible tells us.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is writing to a church that is fighting *a lot*. They've all divided themselves up into different groups, and they can't agree about *anything*. I want to show you what he tells them about themselves, because it's about us too. Listen to what he says, in chapter 12, beginning in verse 14:

The body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.” -- 1 Corinthians 12:14-21

Paul says, the Church is a lot like a body - all the people are like different body parts. And you can't have a body without all the parts. What is your favorite body part? [get answers]

Can you imagine if your whole body was made just of eyeballs? Or just hands? Or just butts? Pretty terrible, right?

Paul tells the Church that it's actually *good* that they're all different. That's how God works. When we're all different and we work together, we're actually able to do a lot more than if we just tried on our own -- just like the Avengers.

We *need* people who are different from us. It's *good* that we don't always agree with our friends, our siblings, our parents. God has put people in our lives who are different from us, not so we can fight all the time, but so we can accomplish together more than we ever could alone. Differences are God's *gift* to us.

That's why in the next chapter, Paul says the all-time greatest gift, the very best thing that makes the Church the Church and makes teamwork possible is *love*. He says,

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. -- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is what makes us able to live with people who are different from us. Love binds us all together. Of course, that doesn't automatically make *living* together easy. It's not like we can just wave a magic wand and make everyone love each other and get along.

Learning to get along with people who are different from us takes a lot of work. But probably not the kind of work you're thinking.

Usually when we hear "don't fight and get along", we think we have to just try harder to be good. But I'll be honest with you - my siblings and I fought all the time growing up, and no matter how hard I tried *not* to fight, we always ended up fighting.

If we just try not to be bad, the best we'll ever be is... not bad. But there's a better way. You don't get better at loving by trying harder. You get better at loving by being loved.

If we want to love other people better, we need to learn to be loved by God better. [Triangle picture] We have two kinds of relationships in life - our relationship with God [up] and our relationship with other people [across]. If we focus on growing in our relationship with God, learning to let God love us, we move closer to God. And if the other person does that as well, then as we're both getting closer to God, we're also getting closer to each other.

This is the secret to truly world-changing friendships, family relationships, marriages, everything. We are only able to love because God loved us first. So if we focus on getting closer to God, we become more loving toward other people. We become more kind and more generous and more peaceful and faithful and joyful. As we become closer to God, we learn to love our friends and family better.

Spiritual Practices
So what does it look like to love God better? We call them Spiritual practices. Sort of like soccer practice makes you ready for game day, these spiritual practices help us become the kind of people God made us to be.

[Kids Spiritual Practices Guide]

Everyone is getting this Spiritual practices guide today. It's got 5 activities in it that anyone of any age can do, and they're practices that Christians throughout history have used to grow closer to God and become more loving towards each other.

This week, choose a practice and do it with your parents, grandparents, your siblings or a friend.

This whole church, from the youngest to the oldest are God's superhero team. God has invited us to be part of the team, to join in rescuing the world. We're all different. But that's good - we all need each other.

So let's commit to love each other today, warts and all. Let's agree to practice loving each other by learning to let God love us better. Let's see what God can do when we stand together!