

Neighboring: Love God. Love Others
Robin Blumenthal - November 12, 2017

Series Big Idea: Jesus wants to change the world. And his plan is simple and effective. It all starts with those close to us. Paul in Galatians 5:14 said: *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* Jesus gave us what is referred to as the Great Commandment - Love God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself. Everyone agrees! But to many it is just a nice thought and idea. It has now become cliché! The majority of the problems of our community could be drastically reduced and even eliminated if we became a community of great neighbors. Followers of Jesus should be light in their neighborhood! We should be different, not isolated, but engaging. Obeying this one command can change the world. That is our mission! The power of being a good neighbor is beyond what we can imagine. It is the plan of Jesus. Back to the basics!

Message Big Idea:

Jesus called us to love others. Love is an action. In order to love our neighbor as Jesus commanded, we must do something that puts love to work. Today we are going to explore how we actually can love our neighbor in practical ways.

Main Text: John 13:34-35; John 15:12,17; Acts 2:42-47

Message Main Idea: What matters to Jesus, matters to us.

Supporting Texts: 1 Peter 4:7-11, Matthew 5:14-16

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Jesus talks a lot about loving your neighbors and loving others. How do you rate yourself in following this command?
2. Reflect on some times that you have loved neighbors or others well and some times where you wish you would have done better. What prevented or stopped you from doing all that you could do love in those moments?
3. What descriptive words come to mind when you think of the Christians you know? What words do you think people would use to describe you? What words would you want them to use and how can you help make any needed changes?
4. Which command is easier for you? Love God or Love others? How are they connected?
5. What is one concrete, specific, "measurable" thing you will do this week to love a neighbor (co-worker, contact, associate, etc.)?

Issues, Questions, Program & Creative Ideas:

- Veteran's Day weekend video & special meal for vets
- Season of Giving mention/red card challenge
- 2 Red hearts

Social Media Ideas:

Screen Information:

Slide 1: John 13:34-35 pg. ____

Slide 2: John 15:12, 17 pg. ____

Slide 3: His Command. Our Calling.

Slide 4: Acts 2:42-47 pg. ____

Slide 4: His Command. Our Calling.

Slide 5: His Command. Our Calling.

Slide 6: His Command. Our Calling.

Message:

Good Morning/Afternoon! And hello to those watching online too!

I want to start this morning by spending a few minutes praying for the families, church, and community of Sutherland Springs, TX. Our hearts go out to their community -and I would like you to join me for a few moments in silence and then I will lead us in a prayer for them. **PRAY**

These are hard days we are living in. If you are struggling with this or anything else in your life, we have a prayer team that will be up front at the end of service and they would love to pray with you. If you are online, your host can pray with you. Also, for those of you that may not know, we are also blessed to have a trained and dedicated security team here on our campus. Each week we have a presence around campus, including the auditorium, outdoors and the children's building.

Watching the news this past week we can see that today, more than ever, learning the Art of Neighboring is important. Community is important. Family is important. In fact, with the holidays coming up - many of us will probably be spending more time than usual with our families, friends, neighbors. And that is a good thing! As for my family, we always travel to CA for Thanksgiving. Traveling is a bit of a mixed blessing. If you are like us, when you travel, you have to make some plans to have things covered while you are away. Both at work and at home. There is a lot to think about.

If you have pets, traveling is even more of a concern. For the Blumenthals we have a printed instruction sheet that we keep updated (Pull out sheet). For us, when we

travel, we most often ask another family if they would like to come and have a "staycation" in our home. Depending on the season, use the pool and the backyard....the mail, putting the trash out. There are instructions for the plants, the pool, how to work the TV (which frankly there are so many remotes that I don't even know how to work correctly), etc. Some years this sheet included instructions on caring for the bunnies, the parakeets, the tortoise's, the water frog, the beta fish, and the dogs. Thankfully, we are down to just the 3 dogs!

My husband Roger and I leave instructions for how we want things to be handled until we return. We have things that matter to us - so we leave instructions so that they will be taken care of.

This brings me to Jesus. Jesus also left instructions when we was leaving earth to return to heaven. Important things he wanted us to do and take care of while he was gone and until he returns. Only here's the thing - Jesus wasn't concerned with pets, plants or homes. He was concerned with people. Every single person - from his disciples to you and me. Jesus knew he was leaving this earth and so he shared what was most important on his heart.

Turn with me to John 13:34-35 as we explore what instructions Jesus left us. Jesus said after the Last Supper on his last night with his disciples before he was arrested:

John 13:34 34 ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Later that night while they stopped in a vineyard Jesus says it again in **John 15:12:**

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you".

Then 1 more time that night - a couple verses later - **15:17 This is my command: Love each other.**

5 times Jesus says the same thing on his final night with the Disciples. To be honest, if I were there that night listening to Jesus - I would have probably responded like my children would often respond to repeated instructions...."Alright...I get it...love each other! I hear you!" And yet, 2,000 years later, we have to look no further than the news on any given night to see that "Yeah, we really don't get it"

Love God. Love Others.

For the past couple of weeks we have been talking about loving our neighbors. 2 weeks ago we looked at **Matthew 22** and Pastor Glen shared about the Great Commandment - to love your neighbor as yourself. The take away that week was "Love where you are".

Then last week Pastor Glen continued the series by talking about the Good Samaritan story in **Luke 10** - (you can catch both messages online if you would like!) Last week we saw that the question that mattered to the man was "who IS my neighbor?". **By telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus was basically saying "You are concerned with the who - I am concerned with the Loving". We can't love God without loving our neighbor; without loving others. We can't lead others in SEEING God if we are not loving others FOR God.**

We have laid the foundation the past 2 weeks - Jesus wants us to love him and love our neighbors. Today, in the final message of the series, we see that in Jesus' final hours on earth, he again leaves us with the instructions he wants us to follow until he returns. We are to love God and love others - and Jesus reminds us that loving others is how people will recognize that we are his followers.

Let me say that again - How are we to be known and recognized as Christ Followers? Love God. Love Others.

Love God. Love others. Love your neighbor as yourself. 3 weeks of messages on this? Absolutely - we need to be reminded - because **what matters to Jesus, matters to us.** It is **HIS COMMAND. OUR CALLING.**

So there we have it - the 2 greatest commands. **Love God and Love Others.** At its core - seems pretty simple. See someone who is hungry? Give them money for a burger. Someone who needs a place to stay? Invite them over. A neighbor needs help mowing the lawn? Go mow it. Single mom needs help watching their kids? Babysit. A senior near you needs help getting to the Dr? Take them. See someone who is discouraged - encourage them. Someone who needs a hug? Give one!

On our church staff there is a quote that **I am known** for saying. It goes like this: "It's not that hard people" As with many organizations we can have a tendency to complicate things with policies or procedures, or details. So my more sarcastic self will come out and say "It's not that hard people." But since I am being transparent - I have to confess, there are times when I have to go back to our staff and apologize and say "Actually, maybe it is that hard. Maybe it is going to be harder or more work than I thought - so I need a little help." For many of us, myself included, I think it can be the same thing with loving others because sometimes - it is actually quite hard and we need help, we need to be reminded and encouraged to follow the instructions, the command, that Jesus gave us.

Maybe we want to help, but we find ourselves thinking I don't really know the neighbor - are they safe? Do they want help? Will they be offended? That homeless man on the street? He is my neighbor too - but what if he uses the money for drugs and not a burger? What if I invite someone into my home and they judge me or the way I keep my house? The laundry on the couch. The dishes piled high in the sink? They look around and see that I don't believe in dusting. Good neighboring, frankly, is hard work. **Loving others is risky work. But in the end it is exactly what we are called to do. It is hard. It is messy. We are not called to control the situation or**

judge the situation - we are called to love - which includes listening, serving, helping.

As I was preparing for this message, I found myself wondering - What did good neighboring look like in the New Testament Church? I am sure it was easier then. I was reminded about a verse that I had recently come across - please turn with me to

Acts 2:42-47:

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

They shared the blessings they had. They went to church together. They ate in each others' homes. They were generous. As they did this, note what vs 47 says: **enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

Then it hit me - the early church was not interested in "Keeping up with the Jones'" - instead the church was interested in "loving the Jones!"

The early church had a reputation for loving people. For meeting needs. For showing Christ's love. Sadly, today, we Christians don't always have that same reputation. If we were to walk down the street and ask people to tell us the first word that comes to mind when you think of the Christians you know... I am not sure that the majority would say "Love" . But wouldn't it be awesome if all the people in each of our worlds - our neighbors, our fellow students, our friends, our co-workers, the people we do business with, if all of them knew that we were "FOR THEM" - that we loved them. Like if any of them realized they had a need or wanted to talk to someone and then they suddenly stopped and said, "I have someone I can call. I know a Christian!" I think that is what Jesus is saying though.

I don't know about you, but for some reason I feel like loving others is harder today than it was 2,000 years ago. A few weeks ago I was talking to a MS class at Desert Christian - (an amazing school in our community) and I asked them "What can you do to love others this weekend?" Some students raised their hands with answers like "be

nice; be kind; play with some new kids in the neighborhood and feed the homeless." But then they got stuck. They couldn't think of other ways that they - MS Students - could Love Others. Sometimes, like these students, we find ourselves stuck with what to do.

I want to challenge you with this - let's face it *It is not really a lack of ideas*. It is more of a "I don't really want to do the things that come to my mind." Let me give you some examples and see if you can relate to any of them. You hear of a friend who is moving - part of you says "I should offer to help." The other part of you says "Whew, luckily I don't have a truck." You see an e-mail from someone looking for volunteers to help and say - "I already have too much stuff on my plate! Delete." You see a justice need around you and pray "Here I am Lord, but please send someone else!" - SO, it is not really a lack of ideas. *It is not always a lack of time. It is often a lack of desire. It is often a lack of priority. It is often a lack of obedience.* **Love God. Love Others. His Command. Our Calling.**

For some of you, maybe this is a new challenge or maybe, like me, it is just one that you struggle with. We are all on a journey to live as Christ calls us to live. It begins with taking those first few steps. Maybe it is an attitude that God wants you to change. Being more open to loving those around you who are different or struggling. Maybe it is a refocusing on your priorities - focusing more on what is eternal rather than what is temporary. For me and my journey, it's not as much about my lack of loving others - it is more about my motives. Sometimes my serving becomes more about who I am instead of about WHO GOD IS. He has shown me that he wants to use my hands and feet - not so that I feel like I have more value - he already values me so much that he sent his son to die for me. But he wants to use my hands and feet so that I can love others where they are for him. So that through my loving, my attitudes and my actions - they can see Jesus. It is not about me at all. It is all about him. You see, Loving others - when we let it - WHEN I LET IT resonates with the deepest part of our soul. Why? **Because loving others is what we were created to do! We were made in God's image and he is love. And at my core, on the days when I truly desire to follow God more completely and more fully I realize that what matters to Jesus matters to me.**

When Pastor Roger (who is also my husband for those who don't know) was preaching a few weeks ago, he shared that he and I were just finishing the Foster parent licensing process. I have to be honest with you, we have had multiple people say to us "why are you guys doing that? Aren't you tired? You have raised 4 girls, you have a young mom and her son living with you now...you work full time, aren't you scared? Worried? The answer - YES! Yes, we are scared. Yes, we are going to have to make changes to how we fill our lives. Yes, we are tired. But at the end of the day...I know that these kids need someone to show them Christ's love. And what matters to Jesus matters to us - and so we walk forward both in faith and in fear, but above all - we walk forward in the knowledge that God will give us the ability and resources to do what he is calling us to do.

I am not saying that you all need to go out and get a foster licence (though if you want info, I would love to share more with you). What I am saying is that God puts people in each of our paths - or puts us in their paths - our neighbors/coworkers/ on a daily basis for us to love. God has given each of us gifts, passions and skills that we can use to love others and God uses all of us working together to meet needs. In our neighborhood, Roger has the gift of enjoying visiting with others. He can talk to anyone, about anything for any length of time. He will go outside to put out the trash and come in 1 hour later. Where were you? Dinner has been on the table.... "Oh, I saw the neighbor and we started talking." Didn't you notice it was getting dark and your stomach was growling and think to yourself...'I wonder if my family is eating yet?' Me? If you know me - I rarely lose track of time...I am always trying to do 15 things in a window that can only fit 10. It is like a challenge to me to earn a Gold Medal in multi-tasking. So - I have a hard time sitting still (you may have noticed) But, if someone needs something - I am the person to ask. Even if it is a meal - just ask me because I can buy and heat pre-cooked food quicker and faster than you can say "Costco".

When I have used my gifts - whether it is reaching out to a widow, a shut in, used something I have been blessed with to bless someone else - I come alive. When Roger uses his gift of presence, of listening, of counseling and discernment and taking time to just BE with people - he comes alive. But this isn't just us. You have experienced it too. I am sure of it. Think of a time when you followed your heart and did something for someone else. How did you feel? What did it awaken in you? **When YOU use your gifts, passions and abilities, your time, your talent, your treasure to love others - YOU TOO will come alive.** I can't begin to count the number of times that I have grudgingly said yes to God and showed God's love to someone - only to come away feeling more blessed, and more alive because of that YES. The number of times I have broken down in tears asking God to forgive my unwilling heart and thanking him for loving me enough to let me be a receiver of the Joy he had planned that day as I allowed him to use me. God can choose to call on a hundred angels to meet someone's needs; to love on your neighbors, to love those in your world, but instead he gives us the privilege and joy of serving. In these moments, we are the very hands and feet of God. **WHAT AN HONOR!** Kay Warren - in her book *Dangerously Surrendered* says it this way. "When I enter a room or situation, I bring him with me because he lives inside of me. I don't just bring myself - I bring the God of the universe! In and of myself I don't have much to offer another person but when I bring God I've brought the one they need the most." Let me give you a few examples I recently heard about from our Pantano Family:

Stephanie - told me the story of how her neighbors embraced her and her family. She wanted the kids to know who the safe neighbors were. They had the youngest kids in the neighborhood. They invited neighbors to come and share a meal with them. This is how it started. "Say hello to Mr. Joe. Kids developed relationships with them. they have been extra supportive since she got divorced- observant and watchful of this young

mom and when she started working - the kids had never been home alone really and they were able to know which neighbors were home and when and where to go when they needed help. Her neighbors are showing Christ's Love.

Cynthia - Has done the Halloween challenge in her neighborhood for 5 years. The Halloween challenge is where we encouraged our Pantano attendees to consider being house of light in their neighborhoods by serving hot dogs and reaching out to their neighborhood on Halloween. Colleagues and their families come, neighbors from down the street come. She has friends who are not believers come and help serve and decorate. New friends that she made in Rocky Point came and helped. Cynthia is showing Christ's love.

Mike - Last year Mike found out that one of his co-workers - who was single mom - didn't have any supplies for a Thanksgiving meal. Other co-workers joined him in gather the supplies for an amazing dinner for her and her children. Mike is showing Christ's love.

ASK ROGER - 1 more guy

Shelley - My neighbor is an alcoholic and lost her job 3 weeks ago. My other neighbor and I noticed her car didn't move for weeks and kept trying to reach out to her but she wouldn't come out of her home. I started praying for her.

Then we had a God appointment Saturday. I took my sister for a haircut and when I walked in she was there getting her hair done. She finally felt strong enough to go out and take care of herself. I sat by her and just let her talk. She said she appreciates it when people will just listen and not give their advice. When I told her I was praying for her she reach out and took my hand in tears and thanked me.

This Thursday I was with a family of students who were unexpectedly losing their mom. I was at the hospital for several hours as family, friends, co-workers came to grieve with them. To sit with them. To hug them and cry with them. To show them that they are not alone. That is what "loving others" looks like in action.

If this is love in action.... Then what about you? What is your gift? Passion? Skill? You tell me what those are for you....and I can put you in touch with 10 ways God can shine his light through you. God has given you love to share with others. The freer we are with God's love, the more his love is known in our world. The only limits are the ones we give ourselves. We can't outlove God.

Love God. Love Others. His Command. Our Calling.

I would like to illustrate this point in a more visual way. Having been a children's pastor for 25 years and a visual learner, I thought this might help cement this image in your mind. For those of you who may not know - Pantano operates with a teaching team who help speak into the messages each week. The team is made primarily of men. So as a disclaimer, I do have to say that The men weren't sure about the use of 2 big red hearts on stage. They are kinda "feely" - great, I am a feeler! It is not very manly they said. I said, Good, I am a woman. Personally, I think Pastor Glen is just jealous that

he didn't think of it. Here is the illustration: (Pick up LOVE GOD heart) If I grab a hold of these 2 commands. If I keep these 2 commands close to my heart, always on my mind, they will begin to affect all that I do. They will be the filter I use to respond. I can't not think of Loving God and Loving Others - because they are right here. If they are in my mind, in my heart, in this case - in my hands - how can I miss it? Holding these two commands tightly reminds me to do just that. One of the guys said, "It looks like you are holding a shield." Great! That's manly! A shield is something that is used to protect and defend. What better way to stand up for others than to love them? When I forget (lay down the others heart), and say "Oh, I am loving God..." but I am not loving others....I am not really loving God. Then I am forgetting the instructions that Jesus left. "Love others as I have loved you." Jesus says it is "both/and".

His Command. Our Calling.

So here is the REAL question. What is God calling you to do? Maybe this is your first step - like I mentioned before - or maybe you just want to say "Yes Lord, use me in a new way today!" If what matters to Jesus matters to you then I encourage you to begin with a simple step - by participating in our Red card challenge. As you leave there are mailboxes in the lobby with red cards. Take a card. There are over 20 different challenges that encourage you to love others by starting with your neighbors and those you work with. They involve bringing a meal, or starting a conversation, praying or babysitting, driving or engaging at a sporting event. For this year's challenge - every card focuses on your neighbors and coworkers. They are first steps - and only God knows what he can do thru you from there! **If you are watching online, you can click the Red Card Challenge banner or talk to your host to get a challenge at home.**

Let me share the card I drew last week with you. As I dug through the mail box to find "just the one God had for me" - I thought - Lord, I am bringing a meal to someone on Friday - it would be great if I draw a meal card - I could shop at the same time - you know, be really productive. I am sure God was like "well, you could....or you could do the thing that I have for you - the thing that is harder, but will grow you more. Sigh. Here is my card. (read it).

I started this message by sharing that Thanksgiving is coming up. Thanksgiving and Christmas are often a time where it is a little easier for us to love others. If you want more ways to do this - stop by our season of giving in the courtyard after service for some great opportunities.

And why do we do all this? Why is the act of loving our neighbors and those around us important to Jesus? So important that he spent his final hours making sure we heard his instructions? I love the way Peter says it in **1 Peter 4:7-11** in the Message Bible reads:

7-11 Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Stay wide-awake in prayer. Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to

the homeless—cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it: if words, let it be God's words; if help, let it be God's hearty help. That way, God's bright presence will be evident in everything through Jesus, and *he'll* get all the credit as the One mighty in everything—encores to the end of time. Oh, yes! **Join me in prayer....**

Have a great rest of your day and join me in honoring our Veteran's one more time with a round of applause (and don't forget the steak!)