

The Great Life

2. Love Con Carne

September 26, 2021

Welcome to the second week of “The Great Life” series, where we’re looking at how we can live a life that is great in God’s eyes. We do this by living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Today we’re going to look at the Great Commandment as written in **Luke 10:27-35** where Jesus connects the command to love our neighbor to the story we just heard of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus was asked by an expert in Jewish law what the greatest commandment was, and the answer in **v 27** is: *“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.” And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*

I think it’s great that when asked to choose one commandment there’s 2 answers given. It’s like asking me who my favorite musician is... I’m not going to be able to pick just one! But the answer also shows us that these two commands are inseparable... they’re two sides of the same coin. If you experience God’s love, it’s going to naturally lead to loving others.

In **v 29**, the expert challenges Jesus. *The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”* This is no innocent question. The expert is essentially trying to get Jesus sucked into a debate so he can be proven right. He thinks he’s got Jesus cornered. If his definition of a neighbor is different than the accepted teaching at the time, Jesus would be dismissed as a heretic. Jews thought of a “neighbor” as another Jew, so the wrong answer would be to say that anyone could be a neighbor. To those watching, the expert’s question would have the suspense of a Western movie when the one cowboy challenges the other to a duel. Tension was in the air! Who’s going to take the other one down?

Jesus, of course, answers the question in the most brilliant way that shows how perceptive he is of both humans and God. He tells the story of the Good Samaritan which shows that **loving the person in front of me makes God’s love tangible.**

The Good Samaritan story implies that if you are someone who seems religious but doesn’t tangibly act for the good of others that are right in front of you, you miss how God’s love works! Loving our neighbor is the kind of worship that God wants. God’s priority is people. When we make loving God our first priority, loving those people around you becomes the logical next step. That’s when the love we experience from God becomes tangible.

Loving God works like a mirror that reflects back the image that’s in front of it. As we experience God’s love, we can now reflect His love to others. This is what it means to be made in “God’s image”. Now, our mirrors are distorted by sin. But when we see Jesus, he’s a perfect picture of what God looks like! Jesus made God’s love touchable

and knowable. This is what we mean when we say the use the word “incarnate”. When we see Jesus, we see what God is really like!

Some of the little Spanish I know are the words “con carne”. It’s easy for me to remember something when it has to do with food! If you get a dish “con carne”, you’re getting that dish “with meat”. You can have chili, but then there’s chili “con carne”... chili “with meat”. You can hear how the words “con carne” and “incarnate” are related.

When Jesus came, he showed God’s incarnate love... he was “Love Con Carne”... Love with meat on it! Jesus was made of skin, flesh, and bone just like you and me. Talking this way might even gross you out a little bit, but I think that’s the point. In Jesus, God’s love was tangible. God didn’t stay above our messiness and avoid coming to our level. Instead, we read in **Philippians 2: Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!**

He showed us the true goodness he meant for humanity when he came as a person in our messy and broken world so we would know what God’s love is really like. Jesus was love with skin!

At the end of this story, Jesus invites us to walk in that same humility and servanthood to our neighbors. He shares the story of the Good Samaritan, then in **v 37** he says, *“go and do the same.”* Jesus wants us to be God’s tangible love for our neighbors. He wants us to incarnate His love! So how do we do it?

First, **a great neighbor... gets personally involved.** The story starts by showing us what not to do... the priest and temple assistant both see the man beaten up on the side of the road and go out of their way to avoid him! This part of the story would push the buttons of Jesus’ listeners. Again, the conventional understanding was for the Jews where loving your neighbor meant exclusively loving other Jews. They were supposed to take care of their own. They didn’t worry about loving people like Samaritans, who were considered heretics. This is why the scholar asks Jesus “who is my neighbor?”

The priest and temple assistant are likely respected as other people see them in the temple, but when no one is looking they don’t even take care of the very person they should be concerned with... they avoid getting involved! But along comes a Samaritan who shouldn’t even care about the beaten-up Jewish man because there was bad blood between Jews and Samaritans, much like Israeli’s and Palestinians today.

V 33: *“Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them.* Notice that the Samaritan responds with compassion and then he gets *personally involved.* If the Samaritan was around today,

he might be tempted to take another approach that many of us have, which is charity or activism that's detached from having to be truly involved.

He could go home and start posting angry memes on his Facebook about the injustices of beaten-up people on the side of the road from the safety of his computer. He could sign an online petition demanding his senator do something. Or, he could make a tax-deductible donation to a charity that helps beaten up people. All the while, he would give no time in his life to the cause he claims to be for.

It's not that charity or activism is wrong- it's a way that a lot of good has been done in the world! But we don't want to have a charity and then live in a way that is disconnected from getting involved with the people who are right in front of us.

James 2:15-17 *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* In other words, we need to get personally involved with the people in front of us!

The Samaritan's response is compassion that leads to action. Jesus even contrasts what a supposed heretic Samaritan does with that of what many would assume were good religious people. It's a way of saying, "we can play church really well, but do we actually care about the people right in front of us?"

We've become so familiar with the term "love our neighbor", but when we go home, do we even know our actual neighbors' names? Do we know what they are celebrating and what challenges they have in life? When we go to work, do we know enough of what's happening with our co-workers lives that we can care for them or celebrate with them? Sometimes we can miss the most obvious way to apply Jesus' teaching of loving our neighbors... which is to love our literal neighbors!

Beth McMullen is a member of Crossroads and is also a teacher. A couple of years ago, there was a time where she noticed that morale was really low in her co-workers... being a teacher is a really hard job! Beth decided she was going to create a space where they could get together, talk about their challenges and encourage each other. She even brought Jesus into the mix and they regularly read scripture together. Beth got personally involved with her neighbors that were right in front of her.

One of the things that I love about living where I do is that Anika and I have great relationships with our neighbors next door. Our back yards are right next to each other and they all love to interact with us. As our relationship has grown with them, we've started sharing dinners together or having game nights. We are praying that since we're involved in their lives that they will be able to experience Jesus through us.

Who are the people you see all the time who are right next to you at school, work or home? What would it look like for you to get personally involved with them?

Second, **a great neighbor...embraces interruptions.** The Samaritan likely had something to do that day as he was traveling along the road, but he allowed his life to be interrupted so he could tangibly care for his neighbor. Meanwhile, the priest and temple worker couldn't let this need disrupt their agenda. ***34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.***

The Samaritan didn't rush- he allowed his schedule to be disrupted and knew this moment was one where his agenda needed to be changed. He wasn't planning on taking care of someone who had been beaten up that day, but he treated the Jewish man the same way he would hope someone else would take care of him. That took time that he wasn't planning on!

Over this past year and a half, our lives have experienced a lot of interruptions. Those interruptions have given us chances to love the people in close proximity to us and have to be patient as we deal with things we didn't plan on during this pandemic. Parents, you have been particularly hit with these disruptions as you had to figure out how life can work with your kids being home for online learning.

There have been a lot of hilarious viral videos over the past year that have shown people like news reporters trying to work but getting interrupted by their kids on live television. One of my favorite examples of this was a court hearing in Texas. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDNP-SWgn2w>

Turns out, the computer the attorney was using was his assistant's and her kid had been using it before this. Judge Roy Ferguson tweeted the video with the caption, *“IMPORTANT ZOOM TIP,” Ferguson tweeted. “If a child used your computer, before you join a virtual hearing check the Zoom Video Options to be sure filters are off.”*

One of the hilarious parts of the video is where the cat attorney says, “I'm ready to proceed with the hearing...” even though he didn't plan on showing up as a cat that day, he was embracing the interruption!

Parents, it's been a stressful season for you as you've had to adapt to what's happening in your kids' lives. There's no one who has been able to deal with it perfectly, and I want to encourage you that God's love has been made tangible as you've shown grace under pressure. Even the moments where you've messed up have been chances to show your kids how God loves them. You have been God's incarnate love to your kids over this past season! Your kids are the most important neighbor you have.

Embracing interruptions is a lesson that's hard for all of us in our busy society. I personally don't deal with them very well. I've got a full agenda between work and grad school. I have my priorities set. But following Jesus helps us to see that interruptions

are opportunities to be God's tangible love to those who are right in front of us. Jesus says that when we serve others, we're actually serving him.

Hebrews 13:2 says, *"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."*

With our natural eyes, we might see interruptions as a nuisance. But Jesus helps us to see that at the top of his agenda is to love people. That doesn't mean we have to be interrupted by every person... even Jesus didn't heal every person in Israel! But when we let God set our priorities, we'll see even interruptions with Jesus' eyes. God's priority is people. How can you see interruptions with Jesus' eyes?

This leads to the third point, **a great neighbor ... leaves margin to give from.** **Luke 10:35** *The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'*

I think one of the reasons that it's so hard for us to embrace interruptions is because we leave no margin to give from. We max out our time or money on our own needs that we don't have room for others.

In the Old Testament, there's a practice known as gleaning. This is where the poor and hungry could eat from the edges of a field, because the farmers wouldn't harvest them. They left extras for the needs of others. This practice existed because Jews knew there was a cost with loving your neighbors and they wanted to make sure to leave extra.

Early in my journey with Jesus, I experienced this in a powerful way. I was a working musician, struggling to keep up with my bills. One day, my car was towed because I accidentally parked somewhere illegally. On top of this, I had multiple previous parking tickets I had never paid off. The bill to get my car out was \$700! I didn't know how I was going to be able to get to work, because I couldn't afford that kind of money!

A couple from the church overheard me share this with someone else, and the next day I got a phone call from the husband. He said he was at a bakery around the corner and wanted to know if I wanted him to buy me breakfast. As a musician, I'm never one to pass up free food! I stopped in and grabbed a bite. As I left, he handed me an envelope and said, "my wife and I felt God prompting us to give you this." It was \$700 cash. I was overwhelmed! I didn't deserve this. I had gotten myself into the whole mess, but they were a tangible way that I experienced God's forgiving love that day. Since then, I've always resolved to leave extra margin in our budget in order to be able to help others when I sense God's prompting.

I know others in the church that have savings accounts that are specifically for needs that arise in others. They leave margin so that they have room to give others!

How can you leave margin financially, with your time or with what God has given you so that you can give to others?

Finally, **a great neighbor ...comes back.** The Samaritan doesn't just take care of the beaten-up man, he comes back to the inn to finish the job.

Kevin Dellape retired as a school principal to lead Backyard ministries in Altoona. He looks to reach those who live in low-income housing. His Backyard Clubs are a weekly presence in these neighborhoods that tangibly express God's love by playing games with kids and sharing Bible stories. One day, some of the residents stopped him and told him that his ministry was different than other churches that had come through over the years for one-off events. The neighbor remarked, "You guys are different because you come back."

When we are personally involved with people, it means that we check back in on them. We don't want to be around just when they need something or to pat ourselves on the back for meeting a need. We simply want to be with them to go through life with them. When we do this, we are being God's tangible love!

God doesn't need anything *from* us. He is *for* us. He sacrificially gave so that He could simply be with us where we are. When we experience that kind of love, we can continue to pursue others in love with no strings attached. In a loving relationship we don't want something *from* someone, but something *for* them.