

The Greatest Commandment

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[0 : 00] So turning your Bibles to Mark chapter 12. While you're turning there, I want to tell you a little bit about my journey in life.

I want to tell you a little bit about my journey in life. Understanding, and growing to understand what it means to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, which is our topic this morning, and to love my neighbor as myself.

So my brother and I, I think I've told you this story in the past. My brother and I started a Bible study when we were in high school that we just invited a bunch of our friends to our house.

Started very small, and the Lord blessed it. And eventually grew to the point where, not all at once, but over the course of that, my senior year of high school, we probably had about 50 different kids come through our home.

Some came every week. Some came once a month. Some came once over the whole year. But we had these people in our home. And the second week of February was our annual high school winter retreat.

[1 : 05] A number of my friends came to Christ that weekend. It was a huge year, hugely impactful for me. The thing that made it effective, looking back to the eyes of a veteran pastor, trying to understand what made that group so effective at what we were doing, was what we chose as our theme verse.

I'm just going to paraphrase it for you. John 13, 34 and 35. Jesus said to the disciples, a new commandment I give to you. This is my commandment. You love one another, even as I have loved you.

By this, all men will know that you're my disciples if you have loved one for another. And my brother and I committed that we were going to love people that way.

We didn't care what you look like. We didn't care if you were cool. We didn't care if you weren't cool. We didn't care. If you came on a Thursday night, you were welcome. And we were pretty bold about saying, if you weren't there on a Thursday night, we kind of wondered what was wrong with you.

But that commitment to loving well was what made the difference. When people came into our home, they knew that they were joining a crew. They were joining a body because we loved them.

[2 : 18] And it was significant. And I saw the impact of loving well, even as high school students. And it affected everything I've done since. So fast forward to 2009.

No, 2010. Kara and I were missionaries down in the Dominican Republic. And I was preparing the training that I would be giving that summer to volunteers who would be coming down to the Dominican Republic to work with us.

Sometimes when I'm preparing messages or training programs or whatever, the Lord will put something on my radar and I can't move off of it. And it's just this feedback loop where I keep going back and back and back again.

And that January, that feedback loop was 1 Corinthians 13. You all know it. The first three verses talk about these things. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am nothing.

I'm paraphrasing. If I give everything I have to the poor but have not love, I am nothing. And what caught me was that phrase because we were giving everything to the poor. We gave up everything to move to the Dominican Republic.

[3 : 28] Everything we owned fit in eight totes. Everything else was in a storage unit in Colorado Springs. By the way, if you put everything you own in a storage unit, I promise you, if you reopen that storage unit in three years, you'll discover that none of that stuff was worth storing.

It was a shocking discovery. I mean, literally everything went from the storage unit to the dump. But we paid that bill every month. So I was stuck on, Lord, what do you mean?

We gave everything to the poor. However, I thought that in and of itself was an expression of love. But clearly, it's possible to do that and not have love.

And then, of course, I went into the rest of the chapter. You know, love is patient. Love is kind, et cetera. You've heard it. If you've ever been to a wedding, you've heard it. Yes, sir. Yeah, let's stop right now.

Yeah. Yeah. So if you didn't hear, John, Pastor Jack was just taken to the hospital. We don't know what the circumstances are. But what I'd like you to do is just with the people around you, just pray together.

[4 : 45] And then I'll pray in just a few minutes. But pray for his health. Pray for his family, for Peggy and Hannah and the rest of the family. And pray for wisdom for the doctors.

But just pray with people that are close by you. And then I'll pray. Heavenly Father, for centuries, you have driven your kingdom forward by equipping men to go out into the world and share the gospel.

To lead people to lead people to you. Men and women who are committed, regardless of personal cost, to serve you.

The author of Hebrews says that the world is not worthy of such people. Lord, I would put Jack under that heading.

I was thinking on Friday, talking with a friend about Pastor Jack and the fact that he is really the pastor of Dubuque. He's been a man that's been instrumental in hundreds of people's lives.

[5 : 56] This church exists because of his obedience to you. Lord, I pray that you would heal him, whatever has caused him to have to go to the hospital. I don't think his course is finished yet.

I know he certainly doesn't think that. Lord, I pray for peace for the family. The shalom that passes all understanding. Lord, I pray for wisdom for the doctors as they assess him and figure out why he's stopping by to visit.

That they would be wise in knowing how to treat him. And how to address whatever problem it is that took him to the hospital. And Lord, I'm very confident that as he's there, cracking jokes and handing out candy to the staff, they'll also be sharing the gospel.

And I pray for receptive hearts for those who hear and see a man who truly loves God. God, thank you for Jack. And I just pray for his quick restoration to health and that we'll see him next week.

God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks, Pastor John. So it's challenging to segue from that.

[7 : 22] So. At the risk of sounding like I'm doing a funeral sermon, which I am not. But I think it fits this message.

When Pastor Jack and I met in April or March, when Kara and I came out for our interview and to preach, we sat down and we had dinner with John and Kathy and Tim and Maywee and Jack and Peggy.

And one of the things that we discovered, Jack and I did very quickly, is that one of the things we have in common, and there are many, is that we're really passionate about.

About what it means to love well. About how that is a foundation upon which we stand. If we're going to share the gospel with people in any meaningful way.

That we shared a passion. To see God's people learn to love each other well. So that the people who come into these doors or encounter us.

[8 : 34] Over the course of our daily lives would know there goes a disciple of Jesus. Because we love well. And that's really what we're going to be focusing on this morning.

Is what does it mean to love well. So I was telling you about my journey through 1 Corinthians 13. And so I was looking at the first three verses.

All of those three things are great things. Speaking with eloquence. Understanding the tongues of angels. Reaching the poor.

But they're empty. They're a sounding brass or a gong. Without love. So I asked the Lord, What does it mean then to bring love into it?

What are you talking about? And I realized as I read verses 4 through 8. That you cannot. Literally cannot.

[9 : 34] Demonstrate those characteristics of love. To a group. You can't. Our brains aren't wired that way. And I coined a phrase.

That my kids said, Dad, that's it. And it became. Probably the best way to put it. It became our family motto.

Love sees faces. And I started telling our volunteers. Every week when they came to the Dominican Republic. You came here probably because you think you love the poor. Or you love Dominicans. Or you love kids.

Or you love to serve. You're using the word wrong. You cannot love Dominicans. You cannot love children. Not the way that the Bible talks about love.

You have to love individual people. And my challenge to them was. Forget about your love for kids. Forget about your love for masses. I want you to spend your time.

[10:33] Focusing. On one kid. Get to know Jose. Or Jessica. Or Luis Alberto. Or Manuel. Or Alex. Hear their stories.

To the degree that they're willing to share them. Study them. Get to know their idiosyncrasies. See where they're weird. And funny. And quirky. What makes them sad. And see what happens to your soul.

Over the course of that summer. Our facility. The ministry. Kara and I served at. Had two facilities. That facility. Was transformed. People who came to work with our organization.

Would visit the main. Site. In Monte Christi. And then they would come to High Bone. Where we lived. And they never wanted to leave High Bone. Everything was better. The food.

The morale. The kids behaved better. We had better electricity. Which is hard to explain. But we were in a rural area. And yet. We had better electricity.

[11:36] Because of love. I don't have time to explain. How that worked this morning. But love was the key ingredient. To all of it. Last week I said.

That you've heard me preaching. For six months. From the front. And I said. You haven't actually heard me preach yet. At our weekly lunch. Tim and John and I were talking. And John says.

What do you mean by that? That we haven't heard you really preach. Because you know.

Sometimes. You think that preaching. Is pulpit pounding. And yelling. And condemning. And pointing fingers. That's not what I.

That's not what I meant. You've seen me get worked up. About a few things. Nothing.

In the eyes of God. Is more important. Than this topic. That we love. The Lord our God. With all of our heart. And soul. And mind.

[12:33] And strength. That we love. And that we love. Our neighbors. Ourselves. That we love each other. As Christ loved the church. Everything else. In this book.

Derives from those two commandments. I'm getting a little ahead. I'm getting a little ahead of myself. So let's pray. And then we'll dig into Mark. Father thank you.

That we have the privilege. Of being loved by you. That you shower us. With your love. That you loved us. When we were dead. In trespasses and sins. You loved us.

While we were your enemies. You loved us. While we were still sinners. And to demonstrate to us. What love was. You died on the cross.

For our sins. As we take a few minutes. To unpack these two. Greatest commandments. God I pray.

[13:31] That you would. That your Holy Spirit. Would speak with power. Into the lives. Of the people. Who are listening. This morning. I'm simply. Not adequate. To convey.

What you want us. To learn. Help us. To understand. To soak it in. And to live it out. God I pray. In Jesus name. Amen. So if you remember.

We were talking. About Jesus mission. Jesus mission. Was fourfold. He was learning. How. To submit. To the father. He was learning. Obedience. Remember that from Hebrews.

He was modeling. What it's like. To be a. A godly human being. So we would know. How to do it. Remember I told you. We had no cheat codes. What Jesus did. We could do.

In submission to him. And you think. John. That's an awfully bold claim. Well. I'm not saying it. Jesus did. Greater works. Will you do. Than these. If we're submitted.

[14:35] If we follow him. And then he was raising up. Disciples. He had apprentices. That he was equipping. To send out in the world. So the message. Could be carried forward. And then of course. He came to die.

To absorb the wrath of God. To take our sins. Upon himself. And to die. And to raise to new life. So that our sins. Would be forgiven. And so that we can go to new life.

New life today. And new life. For all of eternity. If you have not. Trusted Christ as your savior. This is not an offer.

That's for all. You have to receive it. John wrote in John 1.12. But as many as received him. Jesus. To them he gave the right.

To become the children of God. So you're hearing an offer today. And the offer is. To take your sin. Your understanding of what it means.

[15:29] To live a life that's. Meaningful. And significant. To recognize that. You can't do it. But God is offering you. An alternative. And that alternative began.

With your sin. The things that keep you away from God. Being laid on Jesus. And all you have to do. Is say yes. To accept him.

To turn from. Your way of doing things. And decide to follow Jesus. That's the decision. That you have to make. And if you don't make that decision. Well you can stop listening now.

Because if that hasn't been resolved. The rest of this message. Simply doesn't apply to you. But you'll want it to. So you might as well get it resolved now. So then we talked about.

Four conversations. And I'm not going to go back over those. Except to say that this last conversation. We're going to look at today. The man who comes up to Jesus. Is fundamentally different.

[16:33] He's the guy. That we're looking for. When we share our faith. Out in the community. And I'll unpack that in a minute. He's what Jesus called. In Luke 10. A person of peace.

A man of peace. Somebody who's actually looking. And when we step into that person's circle. We're in the position. To share with them.

The message that they've been looking for. And Jesus is going to show us. How you talk to that person. Who's listening and looking. And God has created a divine appointment.

For us to come and talk to that person. We're going to see how to do that. So there's many layers to this passage this morning. So Mark chapter 12. We're going to start at verse 28. All right.

Here we go. One of the scribes came and heard them arguing. And recognizing that he had answered them well. Asked him. What commandment is the foremost of all? Jesus answered. The foremost is hear O Israel.

[17:39] We're going to stop there. If you remember from the other three conversations. Jesus used rhetorical devices to bob and weave to avoid traps. He answered a question with a question.

He refused to answer the question. He pummeled the guy who had the nerve to ask the guys who asked the question. Those are the other three conversations. But with this. Jesus says. Here's your answer.

Why? Why? Because the scene is basically Jesus in the temple. And imagine a line forming.

Or imagine if you ever watched championship wrestling. The tag team events. Where you had two guys in the ring and two guys on the outside. And the guys in the ring are beating the pulp out of each other. Where the guy just reaches out and taps his partner.

And the partner comes in and takes his place. And then he takes a turn. And they go. It's tag team. That's what's going on here. It's a tag team on Jesus. And yet this last one is fundamentally different.

[18:43] And Jesus just answers his question. So Jesus answered. The foremost is hear O Israel. The Lord our God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.

And with all your soul. And with all your mind. And with all your strength. The second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

The scribe said to him. Right teacher. You have truly stated that he is one. And there is no one else besides him. And to love him with all the heart.

And with all the understanding. With all the strength. And to love one's neighbor as himself. Is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. This is a guy who gets it. He understands the heart of God.

And Jesus says. When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently. He said to him. You're not far from the kingdom of God. After that.

[19:40] No one would venture to ask any more questions. Here's a question for you. Why did Jesus say. You're not far from the kingdom of God. Rather than.

You're in the kingdom of God. Have you ever thought about that? He gave the right answer. And what higher praise could there be. Than the author of the book.

To say you got it right. And yet Jesus said to the scribe. You're close. But you're not there yet. What was lacking? You're not there yet. You're not there yet. But as many as received him.

This man had not yet come to the point. We know. He never appears again as far as we know. But he didn't take that next step. He didn't decide to follow Jesus. And that was all that he lacked.

He was moving in the right direction. He understood the heart of God. That love. Is over everything else. It trumps everything. So these two greatest commandments.

[20 : 39] Are found in Deuteronomy 6. We're not going to turn there. And then Leviticus 19.

There's something interesting. I want to tell you about the Leviticus 19 passage. So it's a little bit diverse.

Love your neighbors yourself. Is Leviticus 19. 18. There's a section. It's about a paragraph or two. That lists all these various laws.

About how we should treat each other. And it culminates in. Love your neighbor yourself. What I realized.

In reading Leviticus. Is that. Those. Various things. That Moses wrote down.

Leading up to verse 18. Were what it looks like. To love your neighbor. And we're going to unpack some of that. We're not going to turn to Leviticus 19.

[21 : 33] But if you read that this week. What you're going to find. Is that a lot of what we talk about. From the New Testament. And how we're expected to live. Actually comes all the way from back there. About how we should treat each other.

And the principles. That. Are the outcome of love. And how we should live. To demonstrate love to the people around us. Because it's very practical. It's not just a warm feeling.

It's not just being nice. It's very practical and specific. So let's answer the obvious question. What is love? Have you ever thought about that?

What's love? The Greeks had four words for it. We're not. Four seems to be a theme today. We're not going to go over the four words for love. Don't have time. If you want a really hard read. That will make you think. Read C.S. Lewis's book.

The Four Loves. We're not going there today. We're going to look at something very simple. I found a definition from Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.

[22 : 31] I'm only going to read you one sentence. Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. Love can only be known from the actions it prompts.

What does that mean? So I'm going to give you a very strange example to help you understand what the point of that sentence is.

So I think it was in the mid-60s. There was a free speech court case that came before the Supreme Court. And that issue was what constitutes obscene art or obscenity versus art.

And it had traced its way all the way to the Supreme Court because the filmmaker argued, I'm practicing my free speech rights. And the people who were suing the filmmaker said, no, that's disgusting.

That's pornography. And ultimately, the man who wrote the decision said, we can't come up with a very specific definition of what obscenity is.

[23 : 42] But I'll know it when I see it. Strange connection, but the same principle applies. It's really hard to nail down, this is love.

This is what it looks like. This is what it doesn't look like. But you know it when you experience it. You know it when you receive it. And when you do, your heart says, yes, I am loved.

And interestingly, then your heart says, I want to share it. I want to give it. But love can be known only from the actions it prompts.

Let's talk about 1 John 3.16. Whoops. Oh, sorry, I won't touch.

I got out of order. So turn in your Bibles to 1 John 3. Oh, there it is. Nope, that's John 13. Don't worry about it, Martha.

[24 : 42] These guys have got Bibles. Got to love technology. Actually, that's not technology fault. That's my fault. 1 John 3.16.

We know love by this, that he laid, Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. You want to know what love is? You look to the cross.

You look to the cross. Even people who don't believe in Jesus understand that the ultimate expression of love is found at the cross. Why? Why?

Because there's elements there that our heart responds to. We can't define it in words, but boy, we know it when we see it, and we see it at the cross. Number one, true love, agape love.

Agape was a Greek word that Jesus commandeered to express this new idea of what it means to love. Agape love does not think about merit in the beloved.

[25 : 42] Think about that. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were dead in trespasses and sins, God being rich in mercy, sent his son to die for us.

We were his enemies, it says in Romans 5. Agape love doesn't look for merit. We had none. We had nothing to draw God's affection, and yet he loved us anyway.

So that's the first part. It goes even further. Love delights in the beloved. Can you imagine that? You need to think about that this week.

God delights in you. The only comparison I can give you is when I held my newborn children or my grandchildren, and people would come up to admire this child.

And there was a part of me that said, yeah, this is the most beautiful baby you've ever seen. And I took delight in my son or daughter, my grandson or granddaughter, and I took delight in other people recognizing how beautiful this child was.

[26 : 56] Someday you'll meet my kids. I delight in them. Do they make mistakes? Oh, trust me, they do. But I delight in them. God delights in us.

And God delights in you. So agape love doesn't look for merit in the beloved. He doesn't, or he does delight in the beloved. Agape love doesn't think about personal cost.

Agape love does not think about personal cost. You'll have to look at the cross, excuse me, to see that.

We know for a fact that Jesus didn't think about the personal cost. He loved us. He went to the cross for us. His love trumped any fear.

We're going to talk about that in a few weeks when we get to the Garden of Gethsemane. Love does not count personal cost. And agape love is entirely focused upon the good of the beloved.

[27 : 58] That's the love that was displayed at the cross. That's what was shown to us.

Why don't you just think about that for a second. For God so loved you that he gave his beloved son.

You had no merit. He delighted in you. He gave no thought to the cost to redeem you.

He gave his life for your good. He's committed to your good. That's the measure of love that has been given to you.

One of my favorite hymns is And Can It Be. And can it be that I should gain a share in his blood.

[29 : 12] Died he for me who caused his pain. Who he to death pursued. Amazing love.

How can it be? How can it be? Because he loved us. But the command is that we love him. The greatest command is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Well, how do you do that? How is that possible? We're going to talk about cultivating love. How do we cultivate love for God? First thing we have to remember is God is always the initiator of love.

Always. 1 John 4.19 says, We love because God first loved us. All we're doing is we are reciprocating back to God the love that he's given to us.

So how do you cultivate a love for God? Focus your attention on the love that you've received. And like a mirror, you'll reflect it back. So how do we do that?

[30 : 21] Pay attention. So this week, I had dinner with the Virgin family. Uriah was sitting next to me. And we had this delicious dessert.

I looked at Uriah and said, Do you know what brownies and vanilla ice cream teach you? And he goes, Nope. Said, Vanilla ice cream, when it's married to a brownie, screams God loves you.

Think about it. Have you tasted it? If you don't recognize it, that's such a delicious flavor. Well, I'm sorry. It's so good together.

Why? Because God loves you. God gave it flavor that is appealing. It's good. Pay attention. Pay attention to all the ways that God demonstrates love for you.

In the things that you enjoy, the family that you have, the gifts, every good and perfect gift is from above, from the Father of lights with whom there is no shadow of turning, it says in James. Every good gift you have is from God.

[31 : 31] Pay attention to the gifts that God gives you and rejoice in them because that will teach you to offer back to God. God's fingerprints are literally everywhere.

We just have to look. Just look. Be aware. So that's the first one. The next one is get into the Bible. Read God's word.

Read it like a love letter. God is telling you he loves you in all the pages of Scripture, even the judgment. He's expressing love.

Dig into God's word. Make it your own and look at it specifically from the perspective of, God, how are you showing me your love and your word? You've got to be praying.

Bible and prayer are like breathing. Inhale the word. Exhale prayer. Ephesians 3, 14 through 21. You should look that up. You should make that your prayer. Paul is praying for the Ephesian church that they would understand along with all of the saints the height and breadth and depth and width of the love of God.

[32 : 46] We are immersed in an ocean of God's love. Immersed in it. Like I'm immersed in air. We are immersed in God's love.

We can't escape it if we wanted to. Pray prayers like that. Pray to God to open your eyes. Pray prayers of thanksgiving.

Pray together. Because as we pray, we get to know God better building that relationship. This is basic stuff. We need to be in community. Last week I talked about the fact that we share our brains. When we're together in community, we hear different perspectives on the love of God. we need to be together, sharing with one another what we've heard.

It says that in Colossians 3, Ephesians 3, that when believers get together, we minister each other, sharing psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, scripture. We come together as a body. We cannot function alone.

[33 : 48] We're not designed that way. But in the body, we rediscover the love of God. Make sense? And then gratitude and worship.

Be thankful and express it. Express it. God, I'm thankful for this. I'm thankful for a car that runs. I'm thankful that my children are walking with Jesus.

I'm thankful for my friends. I'm thankful that you have called me to be here as one of your pastors. What a blessing. Reflect that to God. Say thank you to the people who serve you.

Speaking of which, Pete, thank you for stepping in the gap this morning. Brian was sick. His wife put him in solitary confinement. So we need to thank Martha too to let him get better.

But be thankful. Express gratitude to one another for the good things that we have because God has called them to give to us. Does that make sense? And worship. We lift up our God.

[34 : 58] We should sing with our whole heart lifting the God back to him what he's done for us. All of those things together reinforced us how we have been loved.

And it boils up within us a desire to love him back. That's how you love the Lord your God with all of your soul, mind, and strength. So how do we demonstrate our love to God?

I discovered something that I'd never noticed before which is kind of embarrassing to admit because I've read the Bible a lot. Cover to cover.

I think it's a good discipline. I always encourage people if you can read the Bible through in a year that's a good life plan every year. Well, I noticed that Jesus' command in John 14 if you love me you will obey my commandments is actually one of the few laws that he took from the Old Testament law and brought into the New Testament.

Because God said to Moses hey, if you guys love me you'll obey my commandments. He said it to the prophets if you love me you'll obey my commandments. It's a theme all the way through Scripture. God's love language is obedience.

[36 : 15] But it's obedience that's rooted in love for him. It's not legalism. We don't obey to earn his love we obey because we are loved.

That's a critical difference. If you feel ashamed there's a good place for shame don't get me wrong. But if you are ashamed because you missed your Bible reading the kindness of God leads us to repentance you feel the shame turn and just fix the problem.

Don't be rooted in the shame. love destroys legalism because it comes out of it's a heart of love that we've cultivated as I was talking about and we express it to God.

Our obedience says to God I love you. What are we obeying? I'm glad you asked. So Jesus actually the the scribe said to Jesus Jesus you have truly stated that God is one and there is no one else besides him and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as himself is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.

all of the law all 600 and some odd commandments in the law boil down to these two commands love God and love others the ten commandments boil down to love God and love others if you are loving as God wants us to love there's no need of any other rules because the rules proceed outward from proper love does that make sense?

[38 : 05] So what we need to do is to cultivate love love our neighbors ourselves love as Jesus loved us and if we do that that's what God wants for us we need to cultivate that so in the time that we've got remaining I'm going to get real practical about what love looks like and how we practice it and why we need to and I'm going to start by telling you about the world that we live in two years ago we hosted a party at our house with a group of friends from our church in Florida and we were talking about just culture in general and one of the guys that was there a good friend of mine Josh Smith is a peer counselor he does frontline therapy with people over the phone he's overseen by a licensed therapist

Josh is very very good at what he does and just helping people who are struggling with addictions or coming out of prison to get their lives back in order and that particular week they had a meeting with their team of peer counselors to meet with the therapist because the therapist would share with them new things that he was learning and also hear from them what was going on on the front lines and Josh's takeaway from that meeting was that we live in an epidemic of loneliness the number one problem today is loneliness I'm reading a book right now slowly about what it looks like to transition into the fourth quarter of your life as Tim and John and I have defined it that's 60 and over I'm clinging I have two more months in my third quarter but what does it look like to transition and to live well all the way to the day that the Lord takes you home and one of the things that the author talks about is that our senior citizens are lonely people they're isolated their kids are busy with their own lives they feel like life is passing them by the stupid technology is frustrating it's hard they're lonely interestingly

I've read the same story about teenagers about people in their 20s about people in their 30s 40s 50s we're lonely and the statement that my friend said Josh heard from the therapist was that the largest culprit is social media because we're super connected with people but we don't have any significant relationships with anybody I don't agree that's the latest cause of loneliness I've got a couple of songs that I want to read to you see if I can get this part right nope Martha could you get us to the theme from Cheers so if you remember there it is if you remember Cheers was a sitcom in the 80s I think that went for years that was about a bar and

I think the whole thing was inside the bar and these people had these rich relationships listen to the words of the theme song this was from the 80s we didn't have social media back then making your way in the world today takes everything you've got taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot wouldn't you like to get away all those nights when you've got no lights the check is in the mail and your little angel hung the cat up by its tail anybody can relate to that I can and your third fiance didn't show sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came you want to be where you can see our troubles are all the same you want to be where everybody knows your name that's the heart cry of lost people brothers and sisters to be in a place where everybody knows your name be glad there's one place in the world where everybody knows your whoops skipped a spot roll out of bed mr coffee's dead that would be a tragedy in my house because I'm mr coffee roll out of bed mr coffee's dead the morning's looking bright your shrink ran off to europe and didn't even write and your husband wants to be a girl that was kind of prophetic from the 80s but these are real problems that people face be glad there's one place in the world where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came you want to go where people know people are all the same you want to go where everybody knows your name that's the cry of people that's the cry of what people are looking for almost put my notes down that would be tragic

I don't have time to read it but I would encourage you to read the lyrics to Eleanor Rigby if you really listen to the lyrics written in the 60s if you don't have a heart of stone it'll make you cry Eleanor Rigby is a terribly terribly sad song it's about lonely people so we're living in this epidemic of loneliness what's God's answer us we are the answer and as we live out these commands to love God with all of our heart soul mind and strength as we learn as we cultivate love for the people around us people come to Christ they know that we are his disciples because we give love because we show love 1 Thessalonians 4 9 and 10 could have been written about tri-state church now as to the love of the brethren you have no need for anyone to write to you for you yourselves are taught

by God to love one another for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren even those who are in Macedonia in our case it's more like Israel and Nepal but you get the idea but we urge you brethren to excel still more what does that mean

[44 : 50] Jesus' command was to love your neighbor as yourself so to obey that command I have a very simple answer for you you need to look in the mirror how do you know how to love your neighbor how do I like to be loved what makes me feel loved I'll give you a simple answer for me so I'm a coffee snob not going to apologize it's the way I am and I really like dark roast coffee I'm a regular at Charlotte's coffee house where they have a pot behind the counter of dark roast well much to my chagrin and heartache I learned that they are discontinuing dark roast because apparently I'm the only person in Dubuque with good taste in coffee so they're discontinuing this coffee that was three weeks ago that I heard that that news but every time I go in and start to order somebody behind the counter goes wait wait we still have some we found another bag here's some dark roast coffee they know what I like they recognize my voice and they make sure

I get what I like one of the girls made it a point to know my name and now I know her Savannah now I know another one Sarah that's what love feels like to me so do I do that do I get to know people's names do I notice what they care about do you ask yourself because when you do it builds a bridge so on Sunday this week I was in Charlotte and Savannah and Sarah were having their lunch break so I stopped and said to them hey just want to let you guys know I'm a pastor here in town and you're going to be a sermon illustration on Sunday I hope that's okay and it led to a really fun conversation I got more of their story so the bridge continues to strengthen got to know Sarah the first time I met her heard more of Savannah's story then went back to my table and a girl sitting at the table next to me happened to be reading the

Bible and she made it a point to introduce herself to me her name is Eve and we talked a little bit about her struggles and her return to God and what that looks like isn't that cool that's what happens and I wasn't giving love I was receiving love and acknowledging it so know how are you loved what are the things that make you feel loved give you another coffee shop example that fits with the idea of being in the epidemic of loneliness my daughter Kayla used to work at a Starbucks in Colorado Springs and they had a customer whose name was the dragon lady she yelled at somebody every day that she came to the drive through drink was too hot it was too cold had too much cream didn't have enough too much sweetener not enough sweetener they spilled!

They spilled over the side you name it she complained nobody knew her name everybody just liked her she was a dragon lady well my daughter believes to the core the love sees faces she was a shift lead she gathered the team around and said we are going to get we're going to show the dragon lady I want to know her name I want to know her favorite drink we're going to ask her about her day when she comes to the drive through every day we are not going to get her drink wrong couple weeks later the dragon lady comes into the Starbucks first time ever she walked over the threshold with a box of donuts she said to Kayla nobody likes me nobody likes me nobody knows my name nobody cares you care this poor woman looked to the

Starbucks employees for love do you think we could do that I think so so study yourself get to know what is it about that I like and do that for other people take the initiative ask questions notice people it's not hard now you might say to me Pete made the observation that we're a church of introverts I you're going to deny this it's true I'm an introvert my extroversion is a learned skill that I did over time you can do this it's just a matter of asking questions of noticing the people around you be a professional noticer and then my last point because I'm going long is we need to plan ahead in that passage in Luke chapter 9 or

[50 : 00] Leviticus chapter 19 about how to love your neighbor as yourself is the law about gleaning it's really interesting God says don't be efficient when you do your harvest literally don't be efficient don't harvest all the way to the corners don't make sure you get every single ear of corn or whatever you call the things of wheat leave some so that the poor have a place where they can go and cultivate and get what they need to eat plan ahead be sloppy so you can give to other people that's a principle we need to think about ourselves we're going to morph for a minute into a sermon on budgeting and time management decide in advance what you have available to give not just a tri-state obviously we have bills

I'm deeply grateful for your generosity to the church but don't give all that you have to offer to God in the offering basket keep up on reserve when you see somebody who's got a need you can step into it or you can partner with other people around you and pull your resources together and help

somebody who's in crisis but you've got to plan ahead if you don't plan ahead if you don't set aside that money you won't have it it's simple human nature we spend what we've got so plan ahead budget your money and the first line item is God's money which is intended to bless the people around you look for opportunities to bless the people around you and the other one is do the same with your time I'm convinced the reason the church today in America stinks at evangelism has nothing to do with being afraid to share our faith nothing absolutely nothing I have no problem saying that it has everything to do with the fact that we know in our hearts that we don't have time for a relationship and we know if I share the gospel with this person and this could lead to a relationship

I go to Charlotte's to study well now I've got three women there that are friends that I've invited to stop by and chat with me if they've got a few minutes I just wrecked my study time there's one way to look at it now I have to budget better my time what are you doing with your time are you so busy that you have no no margin to reach people then you're robbing God harsh harsh words but you're robbing God plan ahead set aside money set aside time so you're available to do what God calls you to do we're going to end with this John 13 34 and 35 a new commandment I give to you that you love one another it starts here in the household of faith this is our laboratory practice on each other seriously we need to get better at loving each other well it's not enough to greet each other Sunday morning if you see somebody come through and I I'm going to tell you that this is an area where I have failed this week if you see a name come through the prayer chain it might be worth a call or a text to that person or to their spouse or their family pick up the phone be aware of the needs of the people around you and step into it and as we do that here you'll get better at doing it out there a new commandment I give to you that you love one another even as I have loved you that you also love one another by this all you will know that you are my disciples that you have loved one another help us to love well people love you well people come to know you as the Lord in Jesus name