

Love Your Neighbor

a sermon in the series
A Gospel-Oriented, Mission Driven, and Community-Centered Church

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Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” 27 So he answered and said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ 36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” 37 And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Great Commandment—to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself—is the only Bible endorsed program for evangelism. If you love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself, you will always be on mission for Jesus. If you fulfill that one command that has these two halves—loving God supremely and your neighbor as yourself—many people will be attracted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The problem is that most evangelical churches do not love God supremely and certainly don't love their neighbor as themselves. That's why they have to come up with substitute programs and methodologies. They substitute love for Jesus and love for their neighbors with formulas.

There is only one formula and Christ has given it to us. Jesus says, “You want a formula? I'll give you a formula. Love Me with everything in you and love your neighbor as yourself.”

This was all brought about by a question asked of Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Notice what profession the man had who asked the question—he was a lawyer. Lawyers then had different roles than they do today, but the one thing they had in common with lawyers today is they dealt with the law and its technicalities. Then as today, lawyers parsed language to find legal loopholes. “Who is my neighbor?” In the mind of the lawyer it depended on the meaning of the word *neighbor*.

Wanting to justify himself, wanting to clear himself, the lawyer asks Jesus to define this word. He thought like you and I think about what the word *neighbor* means. We think about the guy who lives across the street or next door. As a lawyer, I’m sure he lived in one of the finer parts of Jerusalem where his neighbors were like him. It’s not too hard to love people who are like you.

Jesus blew him, and everyone else listening that day, out of the water. He blew all of their little programmed and tidy definitions of *neighbor* away when He told this story.

What does this lawyer and his question along with Jesus’ parable have to do with being on mission for our Lord?

The answer is that if we simply did the Great Commandment and we paid attention to Jesus parable about how you love and whom you love, you will understand that this text is very informative to the mission we have been called. That’s what I want us to do. I want us to delve into this text and find the information that will help us be on mission as we go out for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said all of this was about loving God.

I. We Must Love God

You’re commanded to love the Lord God. The question is, how much are we to love Him? When you look at the second part of the verse, “love your neighbor as yourself,” it’s quantified; it’s measured. How much do you love your neighbor? As much as you love yourself. But here Jesus does not quantify our love for God; He does not say, “it’s as much as *this*,” as He does with loving your neighbor.

It’s not quantified because we know Jesus is suggesting to the lawyer that you’re to love God more than you even love yourself. He is supposed to be preeminent in your love and affection. You are to love Him above all others. We know this is Scriptural because the Bible says it in other places, but this is the whole thrust of Jesus and His understanding of the Great Commandment. You are to love God preeminently, but that’s not what we always do, is it?

If you are to love God, the Bible says you have to do what? Deny yourself. You have to love Him more than you love yourself. There’s the difficulty. There’s the rub. In fact, you can love your neighbor and not love God. Sometimes it’s easier to love the neighbor than it is to love God

Himself. But I assure you that if you love God supremely, more than you love yourself, you will always love your neighbor as yourself. We must start with the love of God.

Do you love God this way? Is He preeminent? Are you willing to devote your life, your energy, your time, your finances to His glory and exaltation and reputation? Is this the passion and zeal your heart is eaten up with? These are important questions. Don't take them lightly. Pay attention to them, think about them—this is crucial. Do you love God to the degree God demands? With all that is in you, you are to love God. He is to be preeminent. And *then* you are to love your neighbor.

II. We Must Love Our Neighbor

How much should we love our neighbor? As we love ourselves. What does that mean?

A. We Love Others as We Would Want Others to Love Us.

We love them like we want them to love us. It's the Golden Rule. You are willing to do for that person what you hope that person would do for you.

Here was a man who was half dead, as Jesus said, beaten almost to death, robbed, and dying. If that were you, would you want someone to interrupt their busy schedule and help you? Of course you would. The point is, if you are to be a neighbor, a friend, you must care about that person to the degree you would want them to care for you. This is the key. We love others as we would want others to love us.

In this parable, I believe Jesus is summarizing the entire Christian life. He is telling us what it means to be a Christian.

B. Being a Christian Should Be Synonymous With Being a Friend.

This is what Jesus is saying. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is the opening question. This is about eternal life not about having a good neighbor policy. How do I know that I am one of God's children? How do I inherit eternal life? This is where the parable starts. Jesus answers, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself," which means, if you're going to love your neighbor as yourself, you're going to have to be a friend to your neighbor.

Christianity should be synonymous with friendship. Jesus is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. This is a characteristic of our Lord.

As we continue to examine the concept of being on mission—to make disciples—we should love others as we love ourselves because we ultimately love God.

That does not mean that I don't care about my own interests.

It does not mean that I have no interests.

It does not mean that I disregard my joy or happiness.

That's what religion will do. Religion will strip fun and joy and happiness right out of the soul. But true religion—caring for the widow and her orphan, living with your soul undefiled—it will bring happiness and contentment and joy like you've never experienced. How so?

When the happiness of your fellow person and the happiness of God is paramount to you, when they're happy, you too will be happy.

The Great Commandment is not given to steal you of joy; it's to ensure it. It's more blessed to give than to receive, thus ensuring your joy. If you're joyless today, I can almost guarantee you are self-absorbed. You say, "I have a right to be self-absorbed." You've got your priorities all wrong.

To love God supremely means to love His joy and your neighbors' joy as much as your own joy and happiness. In fact, I'm never more joyful than when my neighbor and my God is joyful. It is the key to understanding what Jesus is teaching. This is integral to our mission. Therefore, as we go out, we must establish who is our neighbor by this parable and make them our friends.

Let me illustrate this. When a missionary goes to a foreign culture knowing no one, how are they going to reach that culture? The first priority is to establish relationship. He or she must become friends with the people. He's got to establish relationships with the people. This is our priority also. We are not "missionaries" in the sense that we cross cultural lines to take the Gospel to people who might not have heard the Gospel, but we are on mission and our mission is exactly the same—to take the Gospel and make disciples—and our priorities have to be the same. We must establish relationships and love people.

I do not want you to be half as concerned about doing evangelism as I want you to be concerned about being a friend. Being a friend is evangelical. Why do I say that? Because the word *evangel* means good news. Being missional is about establishing habits or rhythms of loving people around us. We are not the people with all the answers but we can be the people known for loving people unconditionally.

That's what we're looking at here. That's what we see in this parable. We see this in this stranger who comes by and helps this man who was an enemy.

To be on mission is not as much about evangelism as it is making sure the presence of Jesus is in every relationship we develop. In other words, it's for the glory of Jesus we make relationships with other people. Intentionality. We must live among our neighbors and friends and Jesus would. To fail to do this is to fail both Christ and our neighbor.

Being missional is not just about being evangelistic, doing good, or doing community service projects in the neighborhood. Being missional is about being relational, and being relational is to reach out to someone in love and let him or her into your life.

This is what we see in this parable, as we will see more shortly.

Being missional is not an evangelism strategy in the programmed and methodical approach, as we looked at last week. It's not a formula. It's not a canned speech you learn. If evangelism is your **only** (keyword) motive, then you're not a friend. If you are not a friend you do not love your neighbor, and if you do not love your neighbor you do not love God.

We are not trying to create an atmosphere here at Oak Grove that makes us evangelists without loving people. Nor are you to love people with the evangelism string attached. That is not the goal.

I've said this repeatedly and I'm saying it again today because it's that important to me: people discern whether you care for them genuinely or not. Even if they never come to Jesus, Jesus will have come to them through you loving them unconditionally. This is the goal. The goal is to be that neighbor, that friend, who loves the person as much as you love yourself, doing for them as you would have them do for you.

We don't love our neighbors so they will become Christians; we love our neighbors because we are Christians. Friends, that might sound like a nice little slogan that you can tweet out today but it's not meant to be a tweet—it's the truth. This is meant to get to the heart. Love God with all that heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Period. That's it. Just do that and you'll be as missional as a missionary in a foreign country.

There are obstacles to this and we need to acknowledge it. They're right here in this parable.

III. The Obstacles to Loving Your Neighbor

There are things that will try to hinder you from being missional. Please don't be naive to think that because we are transitioning to this new way of thinking, which shouldn't be new, that it's going to be easy. It will not be easy. There is an enemy that is fighting this tooth and nail. He does not like what he is hearing or seeing.

Do you think the testimonies today have pleased the enemy? No, but I tell you that it puts the fear of God in the enemy. When he sees God's people mobilized and becoming sensitive to His leadership and guidance, Satan and hell take notice. They will mount an offensive and try to hinder you and I. What are these hindrances? I think they are namely four and I get them from the text. Let's look at this.

What motivated the Levite and the priest to not stop and help? Perhaps the answer is within us. Look within. May I suggest you'll find four things that will always be a hindrance to being missional

and loving our neighbor? Time, Fear, Ignorance, and Judgmentalism. We don't think we have the time. We are afraid of the consequences of getting involved in someone else's life. We don't know what to do. And we judge people as undeserving of unconditional love.

Let's deal with these one at a time.

A. Time.

Who were these two men who passed by the poor man lying in the dirt and blood? It's interesting that in all of Jewish life Jesus cast these two men in His story. Why didn't He say a carpenter passed by? Or even a lawyer, like the man to whom He was speaking? He picked the two top layers of Jewish society, the priest and the Levite.

The most important functions in a theocracy as Israel was intended to be were the priest and Levite. The priests were the very people who served in the temple. These were the sons of Aaron. They offered the sacrifices, they burned the incense, they worked in the very presence of God. The Levites were there to serve the priests and assist them.

Here, Jesus picks the top religious positions and posts in Jewish life and He uses them as examples. The priest and Levite walk by, in fact, they don't just walk by, they go to the other side. Why did they do that? I can't prove this to you but looking within my own heart to find answers and I'm supposing they were probably on their way to do the Lord's work.

I can just imagine that their excuse for not stopping was because it was time for them to be in the temple and they were in a hurry because they were behind schedule as it was. They just didn't have the time to stop because they were "doing God's work." Jesus' irony was sharp and skillful that day and He was making that suggestion to the lawyer.

It is extremely important that we learn to ask ourselves a question, how can I lovingly serve those around me if I am too busy? If you feel you don't have the time needed to invest in another person, then you are too busy.

We're all very busy, aren't we? We have good intentions to invest into the lives of others, but something always presents itself as a reason why we don't have the time? We say to ourselves, "Oh yes, I know I need to serve my neighbor. I know there's a need there. I can't get to it today but I'll get to it tomorrow." Tomorrow comes and you get to the end of the day and realize you were so busy you forgot. What do you say? "I'll do it next week." We are too busy to see the needs around us that we can fill.

John Ortberg has coined the phrase "hurry sickness." As he says, "Love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible. Love always takes time, and time is the one thing hurried people don't have."

“Time is the one thing hurried people don’t have.” Time is a severe issue that we are all confronted with. Even committing to the missional communities starting next week takes time. When you go to the orientation meeting we’re going to be very clear what is going to be required. When you hear everything you may say, “I didn’t realize that, I don’t think I have the time to invest.” We’re not going to pressure you, we’ll love you anyway. If that’s how you feel, that’s wonderful, but let me caution you: if you are too busy to invest in other people’s lives, isn’t it true, according to Scripture, your calendar is out of whack and your priorities out of order?

If I love God supremely, my time is His time; my calendar is His schedule and He dictates the agenda.

B. Fear.

Fear you’re going to do the wrong thing.

Fear you won’t know what to say.

Fear of the consequences of investing in someone’s life.

Those who have shared this morning have all said there was a degree of trepidation, a little bit of fear on the inside. Of course there is. That’s always going to be there. It’s human nature. And you couple that with the enemy’s attack and you’re almost guaranteed to fear. There is a concern about how people will receive us.

There is the fear of the repercussions.

There is the fear of the cost involved.

And there is a cost involved. You will have to divest in order to invest in others. If your schedule is too busy and the cost seems too much, then you’re going to have to rearrange the priorities, not the schedule. The schedule will take care of itself once the priorities have been rearranged according to God’s priorities.

Fear is always a concern. Here were these two men were probably afraid if they stopped and took time with him that they might be attacked themselves. “I can’t get involved. What if...?”

Once again, I want to ask, if *you* were that man lying there would you want someone to take the time out of their busy schedules to help you, even if it meant they might be late or miss work altogether that day? Wouldn’t you want them to take time for you? How do you love your neighbor? By loving them as you love yourself. How do you know if you do that? You’re willing to do for that person what you want them to do unto you.

Fear has to be addressed. Who can assuage and alleviate our fears? Jesus.

C. Ignorance.

Ignorance is a huge obstacle.

I just don't know what to do.

I don't know how to minister to my neighbor.

I don't know what's required.

I don't feel like I have the appropriate training or knowledge to minister to my neighbor.

Ignorance is always an obstacle to making disciples and living on mission. Do you know how much you need to know in order to disciple someone? Just a little bit more than they do. That's all you need. If you're dealing with someone who is not a Christian then most likely you know more about the Lord than they do.

D. Judgmentalism.

I want to spend a little more time on this one. I think this is a huge obstacle and I see it squarely in this parable.

Another reason for the unneighborly actions of the priest and Levite was because they judged this man to have received what he deserved. The theology of that day said that someone who fell into trouble had met with their comeuppance and was suffering God's judgment. They judged him a sinner. He had disobeyed God somewhere and God was bringing judgment upon him.

Therefore, for the Levite and the priest to have helped him was to participate in the wounded man's sin and have his misfortune brought upon them. They wanted to have nothing to do with him or this punishment from God. That was the theology of that day. They judged him a sinner suffering God's judgment.

I believe this is a major issue plaguing us right here. There are still religious prejudices within our hearts that says something very similar to the judgmentalism of the priest and Levite. We believe the sinner who is in difficulty has brought it upon himself or herself, therefore it wouldn't be right if you helped him or her and they not suffer the repercussions of their actions. In other words, if you alleviate the consequences the person will never learn from their mistakes.

Hear me. There is some truth in that, but there is also some religious prejudice. Let's deal with this and get it done. It's not easy, but let's deal with it.

Are we or are we not supposed to judge sinners? The answer is we are and we're not. How's that for an answer?

We judge that they need our Savior. We are to discern their fruit and know this person needs Jesus just like I need Jesus. That's a righteous judgment.

We do not judge that they are not worthy to be loved. When Jesus said, "Judge not, lest you be judged," that's exactly what He meant. Never judge someone as being unworthy to be loved by God or by you. What grieves my heart is when I hear Christians—and I don't necessarily deny that they are Christians—when they say, "Certain kinds of sins I can't tolerate." Well, we shouldn't tolerate any sin. But we should be able to tolerate the sinner.

It is religious pride that kicks in and makes you think you're condoning the sinner's actions if you serve the sinner. Explain to me how the tax collectors and sinners and prostitutes knew that Jesus loved them but at the same time knew He didn't love their sin? Can you explain how that's possible? They knew Jesus didn't love their sin. He was too holy. But yet they were attracted to His love and acceptance of them.

Beloved, the wall that the sinner has toward you and I as Christians (we discussed this last week), that wall, that stereotype that we're judgmental and hypocritical is partially true. Our lives ought to be open to every kind of sinner there is. For me to say, "I cannot associate with that person because of what they do and their lifestyle," is to put yourself squarely in the position of the Levite and the priest.

You better be careful because Jesus has little compassion for hypocrites. He will have more compassion for the one you're judging than He will for you. Remember, this is about eternal life. This is larger than being on mission for Jesus. This whole parable came as a result of one question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said if you want to have eternal life you've got to love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself and here's how you do that, you take the time, you take the risks, you buck up against your own fear of ignorance, and judgmentalism and you roll up your sleeves and invest yourself by loving them as a friend.

I want to deal with this because there is religious bigotry in all of us, including me. It's there. We have to first acknowledge it before we can let God deal with it. I want you to turn to I Corinthians 5 and look at verses 9-13. In this passage, Paul is correcting a misinterpretation of what he said to them on an earlier occasion. They had misunderstood Paul to say that Christians ought not to associate with sinners whatsoever, especially sexually immoral people. Oh boy, you stay away from them. That's what they thought he meant.

He meant it only for a certain kind of sexually immoral person. Not all. Let's read it.

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. I 0 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

What's he saying? "Yes, you're supposed to associate with sinners! The only way to not do that is to rent a spaceship and pioneer Mars. But once you get there, you've got problems, you've got a sinner there—you!" When you leave home in the morning and come back home in the evening, you have rubbed shoulders with at least one sinner that day.

Paul is stating emphatically, "No, I didn't tell you not associate with sinners. How are you going to be light and salt if you never associate with them? Isolationism doesn't work."

Oh, but pastor, we're supposed to be holy and come out from among them and be separate. Yes, and once again, he wasn't talking about the world but about people in the church who were sexually immoral. We are not to live ungodly lives in this world. We are to keep ourselves spotless. But that does not mean you don't infiltrate the world and go where there are people stained with their sin.

I know that some may not understand what I'm about to say but I need to say it nonetheless to be faithful to you and the Lord. We, Christians, are closing the hearts of sinners by our actions. Our actions say, "We don't love you. We don't like you. And we don't want you." When a business supports something we don't like and don't believe is "Christian," what are most Christians out there wanting to do? Boycott them. Close them down. Register our disapproval.

Friends, you can boycott all you want to but all you're doing is closing the sinner's heart. You'll never be in a world that doesn't have sinners. Every dollar spent is going to somehow fall in the hands of an unbeliever. And if you follow your logic through and be consistent, you better stop paying your taxes.

Paul is saying you can't get away from associating with sinners. If your conscience says you can't spend your money at a specific place or on specific things because you feel like you're endorsing or supporting sin, I will support you 100 percent. But you don't need to broadcast that. Keep that to yourself as your conviction. We need to love people and love says, "I love you. Period. No strings attached. You don't even have to accept my Jesus. I'm still going to love you." How do you do that? We'll show you in a few minutes. If you're angry with me, please have compassion. Be a good Samaritan right now.

Think about your actions and what do they say about Jesus? I'm thankful Jesus didn't boycott earth or He would never have come.

Who did Paul say to withdraw from?

11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person." (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

The apostle is saying, "I don't judge the sinner." And why not; why did Paul not judge the sinner and why shouldn't we? The answer is that's God's job. I understand sinner's sin. What else do you expect out of unbelievers? You're a Christian and you still sin, so what do you expect from them?! I'm not placating their sin or appeasing it, no, not at all. What Paul is saying to you and me is that if a brother or sister starts to live a life that is sexually immoral or becomes an extortioner or any of these other things, we warn them.

We warn them not because we don't love them but because we do. We warn them and give them time to repent. You must give the Holy Spirit time. And if they don't repent, you take another brother and do it in private. You don't go out and tell everybody what you've saw the person do, you keep it to yourself. Then you take a brother and then again give the person time to repent. And if they don't repent Jesus said bring them before the church and if they don't listen to the church, you boycott them. There's your boycott.

You treat them as a prospect for missions and evangelism until they repent and can be restored. But you don't do that with the folks out there. We've reversed church discipline. We're scared to do it inside the church but we'll surely be bold enough to do it out there in the world. We've reversed it and were wrong.

We are to go and go means leaving our isolationism and living among the unconverted, just like Jesus did. I want you to look at another passage in 1 Corinthians. This passage has also been abused and distorted to say you have to be like the world in order to reach the world, when it clearly doesn't say that.

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law

Notice the caveat.

(not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you." (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Please be careful. When we get to verses 20-22 it sounds like Paul is teaching and preaching what we hear a lot of today, "You've got to be relevant. You've got to be relevant." The doctrine of relevancy says you can't be different from the world if you're going to reach the world. They base it on this text and I'm telling you they misunderstood Paul.

Let me illustrate. If you want to reach the big burly guy who rides a Harley and has tattoos and leather, Paul is not saying to go get you some tattoos, get some leather, and go buy a Harley. That's not what he's saying. Go back to verse 19. Here is how you become relevant.

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;”

There is not one person out there in the world that I cannot relate to. The same is true for you. You may be scared to death of that big burly guy. You may have nothing in common with the drug addict or the prostitute. And because you have nothing in common with them you automatically assume they can't relate to you either, but you're wrong.

Everybody can relate to somebody who will become a servant and love them. This is in the parable.

Who is in the pool of blood dying? A Jew.

Who is the man that stops, get's off his beast, and saves his life? A Samaritan.

They were two different nationalities and ethnicities, a Jew and a Samaritan. These two people hated each other with passion. Samaritans had nothing to do with Jews, Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans. You want to talk about two people who couldn't relate to one another, here it is. But what do you think happened when the Jew woke up the next morning and he realized what happened to him and who did it for him? Do you think that he, at that moment, was terribly concerned about the ethnicity of the man who saved his life? Do you think his differentness was a concern? Not at all.

The way you can touch anybody is by assuming the role of a servant and becoming a lover of that soul, serving them in the name of Jesus Christ. Be a neighbor. The kind of neighbor you would like people to be to you. That's how you relate to them. It doesn't matter the color of the skin, it doesn't matter what kind of sin they're in bondage to, God will help you because you are not alone. You've got a missional group that is right there with you, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, on the mission field relating to that person in their sin because all of us can relate to sin for we too were once lost but now are found. We were blind but now we see. Everybody can relate to that.

So here we are. We see Jesus here.

IV. The Greatest Friend of Them All

Jesus is the pictured in the parable as the Samaritan. He is the greatest Samaritan of them all.

Notice three things here and we'll be done.

A. Leaving.

Jesus left His Father's house. Leaving can be as simple as crossing the street to chat with your neighbor. Or opening up your home to someone who is need. Or hosting an unbeliever with a meal or going to a restaurant together to have a meal. It can be including an unbeliever in an activity you enjoy. That's what it means. Leave the comforts of home, leave your isolation, and go where they are. That's what Jesus did.

B. Living Among.

Jesus lived among us. Living among them without condemning nor violating your conscience. Never violate your conscience. Paul said he was still under the law, he wasn't doing the things that were sinful. He's not living as a lawless man, he's living under the law, which is the love of Jesus that constrains him. He doesn't want to sin but he will serve them.

C. Blessing.

Once again, we come to blessing. What does it mean to "bless" people? Does it mean to say, "God bless you," or "Can I pray for you?" That's a very small portion of what the word *blessing* means.

Blessing = the act of relieving the deficits, distresses, and difficulties of another.

What does that mean? It means you leave, you go, you live among them, you invest in them, and you serve them. That's what Jesus told us. The beauty of loving your neighbor is that it's simple and it's real. You don't need to memorize any sales pitch. You don't need to develop any battle plan to evangelize the neighborhood or learn a canned speech. You simply need to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. When you do that, everything else will fall into place.

The goal is simply to faithfully tell your story because your story is God's story. God is writing a story with you and you tell your story to your neighbors and listen to their stories. We desperately want a formula to follow but Jesus made it as easy as talking about Whom you love and why you love Him. Be real, be yourself, and let God bear the responsibility of how He uses your love for your neighbor. But love your neighbor as yourself. That's what we need to do and I pray we don't wait for January and our missional communities to start. Amen.