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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Loving Your Community**  
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Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with our whole being, and that the second one was to love our neighbor as our self. So, we're at the place, in this series that we're doing on *Important Stuff*, where we're thinking about how to love our neighbor. So far, we've talking about loving our family and loving our congregation, and today we're going to move on to consider how to express love to our community. These are all core subjects – vital for happiness and also for following God. I believe, personally, that this one – about loving our community – is probably the one that those of us the independent Church of God movement are the weakest at, because we came out of organizations that focused on taking care of our own small group, rather than being involved in the community.

Let's look at some biblical examples of what Jesus said about how to interact effectively with the community. The first example I want to give you is the famous parable of the good Samaritan. It's in Luke 10, and verse 25. Sometimes we remember the story, but we don't remember the context of the story. So here's a little bit of that.

**Luke 10:25** – *Behold, a lawyer – now that's not a lawyer like we have today – that's a Bible scholar – stood up to put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "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."* So he could quote the Bible. *And Jesus said to him, "You've answered correctly. Do this and you will live."* But he, desiring to justify himself – apparently, since he didn't do those things very well – said to Jesus, *"Who is my neighbor?"* And Jesus replied, *"A man was going down from Jerusalem" – so this is an answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" – "to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped, and beat him, and departed leaving him half dead."* You know, some things just never change. *"And now, by chance, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side."* So a priest – a Levite – a very respected member of society – was going down the road and when he saw this guy lying unconscious and bleeding, he crossed the street to get away from him! *"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion, and he went to him, and he bound up his*

wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he sat him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the inn keeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' So he was planning on passing back by to check on the guy. How much is two denarii? I think one translation says two pence, so that like two pennies to us. How much is that? Back then, two denarii was two days wages for a working person. So how much do you make every day? Double it, and that's, roughly.... So that was enough to feed and house him for awhile. And then he put him on his own animal and he walked, himself, to the inn. Then Jesus said, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy." And He said, "You go and do likewise."

So, do you remember where we started this discussion? What was the question? What must I do to inherit eternal life? That's important stuff, isn't it? That's what this series is about.

It's interesting to me, too, that this Bible scholar – and we've put them down a lot over the years – the Bible scholars of Jesus' time – he knew that this was not a way to *earn* eternal life, but to *inherit* it, because he knew that eternal life was given as a *gift*. So we don't inherit it. It's a gift, but there are certain things that we can do to be in a place so that we may inherit eternal life.

Then the next question was, "Who is my neighbor?" Now, who were the Samaritans? Who were they? Well, they had been the enemies of the Jews since the Jews had returned to Jerusalem. They didn't agree on much with the Jews, nor the Jews with the Samaritans. And the Jews looked down on them. They were a lowly sector of society in their eyes. And the Samaritans didn't think much of Jews either. So let's ask the question, "Who do we look down on from our position in the Church of God?" There are a lot of people who don't *believe* like we do. And there are many people who *think* differently than we think. The point of this, I believe, is, that it doesn't matter whether we agree with somebody or not, or whether we think we're above or below them in social station, our job is to take care of them, whoever they might be – all Catholics, all Protestants, all Buddhists, all Muslims, all wiccans, all the people that we don't agree with, and also all the people that we *do* agree with. It doesn't matter how people believe or how they act. They *are* our neighbors.

I want you to notice, too, that this was not an organized effort. This wasn't a church gathering together to go down to Roadrunner Food Bank and pack food packs before Thanksgiving. This was individual action – personal responsibility. I'm not saying that only personal effort counts, or that organizational effort isn't a good thing, because it *is*, but I think what's good about an organized effort is, it gives us a way to be *personally* involved. However, I think, many times some of us are so weak in this that we wouldn't get personally involved with people, if there wasn't some way to kind of be supported by an organizational effort. And that's not good enough. That's what this parable is all about.

Remember the story about the guy that was knocked down – hit by a car – while he was in a crosswalk back in New England? I forget...there was a video camera on it. And forty-seven cars passed by the guy lying on the road before somebody stopped to offer help. Would you be one of those people? “I’m late for work. I don’t know the guy. Somebody will come along pretty soon.” No, that’s not how it works.

When faced with the opportunity to help people in need, God is, individually, challenging us to do something. We say, “What does God want you to do?” “Well, what does He want you to do today – right now?” That’s how we detect what God wants us to do – what is in front of us right now? Who needs to be helped? That’s how it works.

Let’s look at another one. It’s in Matthew 25, verse 31.

**Matthew 25:31** – *When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him – you know, there’s a pretty clear picture in Revelation of when that’s going to be – then He will sit on His throne. So here’s another parable about eternal life, and who gets in and who doesn’t, and an insight into what questions we will be asked when that time comes. Before Him will be gathered all nations – it says in verse 32 – and He will separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. Two kinds of critters. Which kind are we? A great separation is going to take place. Sabbath keepers on one side, non-Sabbath keepers on the other. Oh no, it doesn’t say that, does it? What do you know! He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats will be on the left. And then the king will say to those on His right, “Come you, who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” if you’ve gone to the Feast of Tabernacles. No, it doesn’t say that either. Here comes the criteria.*

**V-35** – *“For I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed Me. I was naked and you clothed Me. I was sick and you visited Me. I was in prison and you came to Me.” And then the righteous will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink, and when did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You, and when did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?” And the King will say, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, My brothers, you did it to Me.” You know, the term *all God’s children* kind of comes to my mind right now.*

I’d also like to point out that this is not about giving money to people on the street. It’s talking about giving people food and clothing and comfort. Some of the people we see on street corners are going to take your money, and they’re going to buy drugs with that money, and then they’re going to do unspeakable things to other people, because they are addicted and high. So we must *not* feed their self-destructive impulses, but give them something helpful.

I have a friend. She was getting into her car after her martial arts class, I believe it was. And this guy came up to her – and it was dark – it was winter time – it wasn’t all that late, but it was dark – and wanted money. She said, “I won’t give you money, but I will take you over to that café and I’ll buy you dinner.” It’s a lot easier to peel off a fiver and give it to somebody than it is to take them to a restaurant, when you don’t even know

them, and offer to buy them a meal, and sit there and talk to them while they eat it. He didn't want the dinner. He walked away. He wanted money. He said, "You'd do that for me?" She said, "Yes." And he just turned around and walked off. It's important that we know how to help people.

In my practice, I hear some pretty terrible things that have been done to kids. And usually, the worst of those things have been done by parents who are addicts – unspeakable, terrible things. So we don't need to be giving people money. You see that guy on the side of the road, and you have a burrito in your car, you might want to give that to him. But you wouldn't want to give him any money. See, it's much more difficult to really help people, in a real way, than it is to give them money.

How many of you have ever gone to visit somebody in prison? Around here, most of the prisons are out in Santa Rosa, or Grants, or down in Bolin, or Santa Fe, or Springer, or some place like that. And you have to go through a real hoop-jumping session to get into a prison once you get there – after you drive all that way. So, visiting people in prison is on the list, but it's a lot harder than just giving somebody some money, or sending a check to your favorite charity.

Verse 41 – continuing on in our reading, it says:

**V-41** – *Then He will say to those on His left, "Depart from, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me no food. I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me." And then they will also answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or ...thirsty, or, ...stranger, or ...naked, or ...in prison, etc." And then He will say, "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, My brethren, you did not do it to Me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous, into eternal life.*

I mean, how much more clear can He be? When was the last time you visited somebody that was in prison, or bought somebody a dinner that was hungry, or gave somebody your clothes, because they were under a freeway? I mean, these are questions for us. It's pretty easy to be insulated, in our society, from those people who are in need. Jesus went looking for them. After awhile, they found out about Him, and they would come to Him. Maybe, if we did that, people would come to us.

My father told me that during the Great Depression, he made more money than he ever made in his life. He said that all the people who were hungry... word got around that they could go to his back door and be fed. I don't think he went to church. I think he was just taking care of people – tried to – when he had the money to do so. They didn't give money away. They gave food away and people would come to their back door.

So, in the discussion that Jesus was having with the Bible scholar about inheriting eternal life, they were talking about the last six of the Ten Commandments, as having, at their

core, the principle of loving your neighbor as yourself. This expands on Jesus' instruction to take care of those people in need. That's what this parable is about.

Let's read that Golden Rule. It's in Matthew 7, and verse 12.

**Matthew 7:12** – *So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets.* Take care of people. Don't do to others what you wouldn't want done to yourself. That's the reverse of it. Very important.

How else can we talk about loving our neighbor? Let's go to Romans 13:8. It says, in Romans 13:8:

**Romans 13:8** – *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandment, you shall not commit adultery....* Now where is that found in the Bible? That's Exodus 20. *...you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandments are summed up in this word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

So, all you folks that don't think that the Old Testament has any laws in it that we should obey, please explain this to me. Here Paul is telling us that the Old Testament laws are all about Godly love. There isn't anything in the New Testament that is all that new. And it's clearly explained in the Old Testament – that the law was about love. And, here, Paul reiterates that. And he quotes the last six of the Ten Commandments to show how to love your neighbor. That's pretty important. I think, when we talk about our community, we kind of get away from that – the independent and other churches of God.

So, we watch the news every night and we see all sorts of examples of treating people in ways that they would not want to be treated. Right? All the latest child abuse is sensationalized locally on the news so much that you would think everybody is a child abuser. I mean, it's way overstated – all the way to the US senator that was stalking young girls on the Internet recently. What his name? Edwards – that committed adultery while his wife was dying of cancer. Would he want that to be done to him? All these things are obviously violations of the principle of love neighbor as self.

Let's talk about – this is very important – what is it that makes it harder for some people to obey that law and love their neighbor as themselves than it is for others? It's really an important question, because if we *knew* the answer, then we could raise children who have an easier time obeying God. Wouldn't that be important? It would, wouldn't it?

The answer is in what we, today, call *empathy*. In the Old Testament, it was called *lovingkindness*, and in the New Testament, it's called *the mercy of God*. But it is, basically, about understanding the experience of other people. In psychology, they call that the cornerstone of human civilization. If no people could understand the experience of others, then they would have no way to understand what they would want to have happen to them and what they wouldn't, and how to treat other people.

Who is this guy whose daughter was murdered, and he now has a TV show that's responsible for the apprehension of thousands of criminals? He doesn't want other parents to go through what he went through. Empathy. That's empathy at work, isn't it? He understands what it feels like to lose a daughter to violent crime.

Here in Albuquerque, there was an attorney whose child was killed in an automobile accident. And he met a couple of therapists whose son died in a school accident – they were married to each other – and then a few more parents, they ran into, who lost children. I think they all met at the Compassionate Friends Support Group, which is for people who have lost children. But together, they formed an organization called The Children's Grief Center of New Mexico. And through this organization, thousands of children in our community, who have lost siblings or parents, have been helped. And that started because they knew what it was like to lose someone that you really loved. It was really important. That all started with the desire to help others heal from the losses that the founders themselves had experienced.

Let's go to Colossians 3, and verse 13, while I think about and we can read it.

**Colossians 3:13** – *...bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* See, we couldn't do that if we didn't have empathy. He appeals to a sense of empathy, believing that we have it – that we know what it feels like to be forgiven. And so we want to be forgiven, and we should extend forgiveness to others.

But it's not necessary to experience something bad in order to want to help other people. Did you know that? All the examples so far are about people who have had something bad happen, and so they try to prevent that for others. The desire to help others, and to understand others, can come from somewhere else. Many people who suffer want others to suffer as they have. Have you ever met people like that? So suffering can have just the opposite effect in people than with the attorney, and the therapists, and the guy that formed the organization to catch criminals. There's more to it than just suffering and then reacting, because you can react either way. So what is it that is the difference there?

Well, where does that desire to help come from if it doesn't always come from experience? Well, actually, it comes from experiencing empathy being given to us – having empathy shown to us. It begins in infancy – when that baby is just waking up, and it's cold, hungry and wet, and it starts to fidget, and then it starts to whimper, and then maybe it will cry, if mom or dad don't get there quick enough. But then they finally do, and they change the baby, they feed the baby, they dress the baby, and they look into the baby's eyes and talk baby talk to it, and the baby begins to understand, as this happens day after day, “Oh, these people know what I need and they're going to take care of me, they understand me – or they 'get me' – and everything's going to be good.” There is something about that experience that helps people, that have been treated that way in infancy, to know how to understand other people. It begins right there. And we learn, as

we grow up, “Oh our parents – they understand us,” and so we just absorb that trait. And we learn how to do that with other people.

So parents can make it easy for children to have faith in God, and to obey God, or they can make it hard. That’s where it all starts. Isn’t that the most interesting thing – how much power God gives to parents to raise children who are going to be in relationship with Him. It’s something that’s very important for us.

We don’t have much time left, so let’s move to one more area I want to talk about today – another area of loving our disciples.

**Matthew 28:19** – *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.* So who would these people be that we’re going to turn into disciples? Well, they would be our neighbors, wouldn’t they?

So how would we make disciples? Well, in our group, we’re probably most familiar with paying and providing a big media operation to reach out to people, preaching the gospel electronically. But they preached the gospel in the early New Testament – because they didn’t have media. They were persecuted. They were scattered. And it tells us that they preached the good news wherever they went – not just the ministers, but also the membership – and not just the Jews, but also the Gentiles. Read it in Acts 8.

Part of loving our neighbor is a responsibility to make disciples out of them, if God so wills. So how do we do that? Well, it kind of all works together, actually. Go with me to Matthew 5:14. Jesus said here:

**Matthew 5:14** – *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket – though I know some who have – but on a stand, and it gives light to all the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others – why? – so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* What would those good works be? Well, of course, obedience to the law of God, our observance of the Sabbath and the festivals. And how would people get close enough to even learn about that? Well, probably by taking care of people who need help.

I was talking to Guy Swenson yesterday. Last Sunday, at Pentecost, they had 34 people at church. Seven years ago, it was just Guy and Jennifer sitting in a living room. What have they been doing? Well, they’ve been taking care of the poor people in their community. Some of the people who attend with them are some of the poor that they’ve taken care of, but most are not. Most of the new people are those who *saw* them taking care of the poor people – realized that they were glorifying God and wanted to get in with them. And then, when they found out that they observed the Sabbath and the holy days, they were curious and started asking questions, and decided to give it a try, I guess. When Jesus was here on here, He spent a good bit of His time taking care of the poor and disadvantaged. Some of them became followers, but others, who saw, became followers also.

So this commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves has wide-ranging implications – not only for the growth of your local group, but also for the spiritual health of your children, and also for our own spiritual health, because, when we stand before Christ, and God is trying to decide whether we're a sheep or a goat, that is going to be the primary criteria, we're told. It's interesting, too, that when we start doing it this way...well, let me say, this: It's possible for God to draw people to Himself by what we're doing. He can reach those whom He is calling. And if we let our light shine in this way, then God will be glorified in that. Instead of drawing unbalanced people, who are in it for the wrong reasons, we will be attracting people who value what God values. Maybe that's why He's calling them. And once they see what God is doing, they will be curious about the other aspects of the law and inquire about the things that we do that are different from others.

This is a proven model for Sabbath-keepers. Did you know that? The Seventh Day Adventists – although we are *not* Adventists – have done this since the beginning of this country. And they are quite a large organization. It follows that, if we would do it, we would grow, too.

Well, there's a ton more we could say about loving our neighbors in our community. We didn't talk about jury duty, voting, crime reporting and all other civic duties, but did hit some pretty important central issues. We have some others areas to hit in the love your neighbor category, so stay tuned as we march through this series on *Important Stuff*.