

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Here we go again, some more words about love. Have we not been told a million times or more that we should love our neighbors? Don't we all know how much better things would be if we were more loving? Well maybe it is time that we all get on with it. It is good for those whom we love, it is good for us, and we are being obedient to God. Jesus said in Mark 12: 30, 31 (NIV):

“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: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Love is spelt **L O V E**. Each letter serves as a guide to how we can demonstrate love to our neighbors. But who are our neighbors? As Jesus demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), our neighbors are not only those who live next door, but everyone with whom we interact.

L can indicate “**look** and or **listen**”: look at our neighbor and listen to our neighbor. We need to take time to look at the people around us. This includes looking at those near and those far, the lowly and the not so lowly, the clean, the dirty, the rich, the poor, those who share our views and those who do not. We need to think about why they are the way they are, to think about ways in which we identify with them, and the things we have in common with them.

We need to listen to our neighbors. Sometimes we talk a little too much; giving the impression that we have little regard for what others have to say. As we listen to our neighbors we can hear their opinions, their goals, their hurts. As we look and listen we can then love by responding specifically. We do this by sharing of something that we have: a word of encouragement, an opinion, some advice, a meal, a shirt, a dress, etc.; and or by praying.

O: We need to **open** a door for someone. We should look for **opportunities** to create paths of progress for others. Many people are forced to live in deplorable environments – both physically and mentally. Some stumble through life from unfortunate situation to unfortunate situation leading often towards a sad end.

Then we come along and we must make a decision. Are we going to look the other way or are we going to be like the Good Samaritan? We can use something we have or someone we know to open a door of opportunity, i.e. to really show love. Maybe we can give a loan, give a scholarship, payoff a lingering debt.

Others find themselves in situations that seem to stifle them. To them it appears as if there is no way out. They may be there because of bad choices they made or due to bad choices or decisions others have made.

In John 4 we see Jesus on His way from Judaea to Galilee. This journey took Him through Samaria. This was not the route normally taken by Jews. Due to certain historical events, which we will not deal with here, the Jews did not associate with Samaritans. Jesus took a rest by a well at about noon. There came a Samaritan woman who was trapped by her circumstances. She was living an immoral life and possibly chose to go to the well at noon in order to avoid having to interact with others from her neighborhood.

Jesus started a conversation with her. She was naturally taken by surprise at His civility. Jesus could have avoided this encounter. He could have stepped back some distance from the well to give her some space. Or, if he didn't move, he could have remained silent. But out of love for her he opened the door so that she could walk into eternal life.

In John 4: 13-14 (NIV) it is recorded that Jesus said to her: *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* And the Samaritan woman walked right through that door.

V: Visit and **validate** others. We can visit someone, take along a gift. Or we can phone someone or send a greeting. This indicates to that person that he or she is important, worthy, still considered to be in the loop. Furthermore, someone may need a good word spoken on his or her behalf.

Often when we interact with other people, we evaluate them. We may see in them things that we do not like and at that point we may decide to restrict or stop the interactions between us and that other person. But we need to give love a chance. Is there something about that person that we can appreciate? Maybe we should look for an opportunity to say something good about that person, recommend them to someone; indeed validate them when no one else would.

The Apostle Paul had a "past". That "past" constituted a serious roadblock to him being accepted among the early Christians. Paul needed some validation. In Acts 9: 26 (NIV) it says: *"When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple."*

A loving brother named Barnabas stepped up to the plate with a validation for Paul (who was earlier referred to as Saul). Barnabas *"took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus."* Acts 9: 27.

The validation given by Barnabas worked on Paul's behalf. As a result Paul was able to move *"about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord."* Acts 9: 28.

E: Encourage your neighbor. There are so many things that can cause one to get discouraged. Some examples are: did not get that desired job, did not receive the phone call that was hoped for, lost a competition that really should have been won, got a bad medical report, heard some bad news about a relative or friend, did not get the desired promotion at work or lost that job, and the list could go on almost interminably.

In times like these we need to have an encouraging word to share with that neighbor. Maybe we had a similar experience and someone can benefit from hearing how we coped. Or if there is no experience to draw upon, we should have a scripture verse that we could quote; for example:

Isaiah 40: 30, 31 (NIV) – *“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

Maybe that neighbor needs to hear the good news of God’s great love:

John 3: 16 (NIV) – *“For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Lamentations 3: 22-26 (NIV) – *“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”*