

# “Love Your Neighbour As . . . What? ”

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*Part of a series on Being a Neighbour*

Mark 12:28-34

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## Number One

We call this Jesus' "Great Commandment." This Fall, I've been intentionally using the Great Commandment to frame our worship.

*"Of all God's commandments, which is the first?" the scholar asked Jesus. "What's most important?"*

Jesus reminds him, and us, what God has already said. He brings together two commands and bundles them together as one.

First, from Deuteronomy: *Israel, listen! Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD! Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength.*<sup>1</sup>

We grow our love for God by realizing who God is. I've been using artwork to help us rejoice in God more fully:

God is the Eternal Community, the relationship of love among the Father, Son and Spirit. God, the Community of perfect love, invites us in.

God is the Eternal Embrace. No matter what we do or who we are, God welcomes and holds us, forever.

God is the Eternal Election. God chooses us. So God has come amongst us in Jesus, God Almighty, the Pantocrator (as this painting is called). So absolutely nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Jesus.

Jesus then wraps "Loving God" together with this from Leviticus: *You must love your neighbour as yourself.*<sup>2</sup>

## As Yourself?

Love your neighbour as you love yourself. Love your neighbour as though your neighbour was you. Give to your neighbour the same generosity, the same care, the same mercy as you'd expect.

But what if I don't love myself?

I think I'm not worth much. I'm unwanted. I'm not good. I have nothing to offer. There is no point to me. I might get those messages from other people. From the world around me. Maybe from those who raised me. These might be dug into the depths of

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19:18. The whole chapter gives examples of what loving our neighbour looks like.

me, where they spread and fester, and overtake me.

If that's how I feel about myself, can I love others?

Actually, you can.

Some say that to love others, we need to focus on loving ourselves first. We get our self-love together, then we can other-love. To me, that misses Jesus' point. Jesus' "Great Commandment" turns us to others. Love God, who is not you. Love your neighbour, who is not you.

Our culture teaches this "love-yourself-first" thing. It sanctifies self-focus, self-centredness, self-absorption, as if these will lead to a healthy self-esteem. I don't think they do.

I often have trouble with what I'm feeling about myself. There is important self-work I need to do. But continually circling around myself sticks me in a spiral.

If, however, I turn my thoughts to how I can help someone else, how I can act with love for a neighbour, I break out of that spiral. I see that I can bless them. I realize that I, even messed-up me, can be a blessing. Therapy has helped me over the years, but that has helped me more. Getting my mind off myself helps my self heal.

As You are Loved

*Love your neighbour as you love yourself.*

Do we do this by loving our neighbour *as we are loved*? As you are loved.

If how I love my neighbour is determined by how I love myself . . . well, as I've been saying, my self-love is not very reliable. I've absorbed all sorts of distortions about myself, and made up some terrible ones too. As a lover of myself, I'm fickle, and moody, and not so faithful.

But as I am loved . . . by God! God, who "Eternally Elects" you and me, so that nothing — not even ourselves — can tear us away from God's love! God, who "Eternally Embraces" you and me, so that no matter how far we've run, there is always the way back, because in Jesus God runs out to get us. God, the "Eternal Community" of love, who welcomes you and me in.

No matter what you think of yourself, that is God's love for you. Not fickle. Not moody. Always faithful.

*Love your neighbour as you love yourself.*

*Love yourself as you are loved.*

You are lovable, by the One who knows you best: you, the good stuff; you, the messy

stuff; you, the ugly stuff. That's the "you" God chooses. That's the "you" God embraces. That's the "you" God delights to walk with.

*Love yourself as you are loved.*

*Love your neighbour as you love yourself.*

*For as God loves you, that's the love God has for your neighbour too.*

### Knowing Your Neighbour

This is your neighbourhood map. If you know tick-tack-toe, you can make this map.<sup>3</sup>

	YOU	

Where you live is in the middle. Around you is your immediate neighbourhood. How it works depends on what sort of place you live in. A town street, an apartment building, a retirement home, a rural side road . . . how it will work for you will depend, but the idea is the same. Draw a grid, with spots for those who live close to you.

Next: write in each box the names those who live in that home. Don't know them? Here's a good chance to find out

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon's book [The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door](#) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), pages 36-39.

Now, you can start praying for them *by name*. You might not know anything else, but God knows them. You are joining your prayers to what God is doing in their lives. Simply asking God to bless them today is a great beginning.

Next: what do you see? Write is something about each neighbour, based on what you can observe. This are things that you can know without needing to talk to them. (*They leave early for work every morning. The kids go to school. One child loves hockey. Things like that.*)

Add what you see to your praying. *God, bless them today as they go to work. God, thank you for the daughter's passion for hockey.* Your prayers become more tailored to what is going on in your neighbours' lives.

Next: Talk. To really begin knowing and acting with love, we need to talk with them. Start with simple "Hellos." Move on to small talk. Eventually, it might go deeper. What is something you can learn only by talking with them? *They go to work every day, but they're thinking of switching jobs because they aren't happy where they are. Or, they're working from home these days. She's really good at hockey.* Write that down in their box.

Your prayers become more and more tailored to who they are.

Not sure how to start a conversation? Pray about it. Ask God to create an opening. This is a chance for you to share too, letting your neighbour into your life. Neighbouring is a two-way relationship.

### Loving with Jesus

Love is never "general." It's always specific. In that sense, God does not love everyone! God loves ever single person, and everything that is them, specifically.

Acting with love is always specific to each person. So to love them, we need to know them. This map is an invitation. No matter how well you known your neighbours, can you know them more, and so love them better?

Whenever you act with love for your neighbour, you are becoming part of what God is doing in their life.

Francis Schaeffer said, "*Love . . . is the mark Christ gave Christians to wear before the world.*"<sup>4</sup>

Jesus clothes you with his love. So when others see you acting with love, they see Jesus. Think about that! It's incredible. It's a miracle. It's a gift. So thanks be to God!

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2004), 59