



Christianity in Real Life-Part 7

Exceptional Love with Exceptional Motives

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, if you've been with us, you know we've been working our way through the Gospel of Luke. We've been in the middle of a sermon Jesus preached on some level place, and he was preaching on a variety of things that were quite convicting. But he's going to get to a place here today in our study of that sermon where he is going to question your definition and my definition of love. And in a way, it's perfectly the way we would speak of it, I suppose, in terms of what it means to be a friend, what it means to be kind, how we interact with those at work, in our family, or neighbors—that kind of love. He wants to challenge and redefine, and I think that's important for us for a number of reasons, particularly because when it comes to evaluating whether or not I'm loving people as Christ wanted us to love people, we usually just think in terms of: Did I do anything bad to anyone? Did I offend anyone? Have I acted unloving? I mean, get to the end of the week, you might say, "Well, I did all right; I don't think I was unloving to anybody," and we don't give it a whole lot of thought.

Well, if you really look not only at what Jesus says here on the Sermon on the Plain, but if you just start looking outside of that, at all the things the Bible says about love, you'd recognize that that just won't suffice. It's super important that we think about not just "Did we act unloving this week?" but "Did I really exemplify the kind of love that Jesus speaks of here in the middle of this sermon?" Because the kind of love he speaks of is not the kind of love, he says, that most of you naturally would express to other people. It's not the kind of friendship or the kindness that you would show. It's distinctive, it's different, it's unique, it goes beyond that.

And let me give you two quick reasons this would be super important for you to evaluate in your own life. Number one, if you look throughout the Bible, you'll find that this is the hallmark of whether or not you are genuinely forgiven of your sins and saved, or whether you're not—whether you're a Christian or whether you're lost. All of that, the Bible says, really can be measured by whether or not this distinctive kind of love is present in your life. I'll just throw out a couple of references real quick: 1 John 3:14—actually the whole book of 1 John—but that one little verse is, "We know we've passed from death into life"—the category of death, get to the end of our lives separated from God, or life forgiven eternally—"We know we've passed from here to there," because he says, here's the one indicating factor, the foundational distinctive: "because we love one another."

Think about that. I know that I'm a Christian, because that text says, because I have this thing—this thing resident in my life—that Jesus spoke of: not the kind of love everybody has; a different kind of love active, demonstrated in my life. Maybe a more familiar text if you grew up in church; they turn it into a song—please don't sing it or start clapping when I recite it—but you know the verse there in 1 John 4:7–8, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Think about that. Now, think of those words: I know that I



actually am saved, that God is in my life because of this thing—love. “Everyone who loves...” You say, “Well, I know all kinds of non-Christians that love each other.” It’s not the kind of love we’re talking about. This is unique and distinctive. It’s the kind of love that Jesus takes time to define for us on the Sermon on the Plain.

It’s not only something that would indicate whether or not I’m even a real Christian; it’s something about us corporately that we can’t do without. We’ve got a job to do as a church, as an organization on the planet, and the Bible says that if we don’t have God’s love among us, we will fail in our mission. It says later in that passage, in 1 John 4:12, he says, you know, the reality of love amongst all of you is the—it’s the awareness that God is there. I mean, God abides with you when we love one another. Now, that’s not a statement about God’s omnipresence or even our justification, but there’s something about the testimony—the weightiness of our testimony—if we’re really Christians. The organization is going to be demonstrating that they are of God when this is active and present in their church. Now Jesus, I suppose—maybe more familiar verse—John 13:34: “By this all men will know that you’re my disciples”—is that more familiar?—“if you have love for one another.”

Now again, the kind of love—you can’t use the world’s definition for this. You have to say, “Well, you must not be talking about normal, common love, because everybody seems to love somebody.” We’re talking about the kind of love Jesus takes time to define, and it’s bound up in something that people have called since the 17th century at least—the Golden Rule. And if you think, “Well, the reason it’s called the Golden Rule, Mike—and I’ve done a little work on this,” you might say, “it’s because everyone seems to have it. It’s kind of the nut, the kernel, the center of all kinds of morality and ethics and religions, and there’s nothing unique about the Golden Rule to Christianity.” Well, I suppose there’s some truth to that, in that at least you’ll find this ethic, this principle, in a lot of different people. You’ll find it not only in religious leaders—even before Christ, Seneca, the Latin orator, the statesman—he spoke some version of this. You’ll find it in Confucius’s statement. You’ll find at least a similarity of it in all kinds of writing. But you should note that what we usually see is the inverse of the Golden Rule as it’s placed in the Bible—the so-called Golden Rule.

This is something Jesus does: not just say what we would often say at the end of our week, “Have I treated someone poorly?” That’s usually how the “golden rule” as the secularists look at it—that’s the present principle in those religions and constructs of ethics. They would say, as it’s put in Tobit—if you read the Apocrypha lately, you good Protestants?—there’s this scene in Tobit, the intertestamental book in the Apocrypha, where he’s giving his little lecture to his son Tobias before he goes off to find his wife and all of that—if you know the story—it’s kind of a Hamlet moment where there’s this instruction from dad, and he says to him, “The things that you hate, don’t do those to anybody.” That’s the inverse of the Golden Rule. And that is, if you get to the end of your week, you want to look back and say, “I didn’t do anything to anyone that I would have hated having done to me.” But that’s not the Golden Rule, is it?

Take a look at it—very unique to Christianity—in that it’s stated in the positive, which raises the bar a whole lot higher than just, “Did I stay out of trouble in terms of my relationships, and not offend anyone or hurt anybody or be hateful toward anybody?” This is Luke 6. I’m sorry, I didn’t get a chance to turn there, but you punched it in, it’s already up, it’s on your lap, is it not? Look at it with me, please—at Compass Bible Church it’d be good for you to look at the Bible as I go through this—Luke 6:31. Let’s start there. So where we left off last week: “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” Now, can you see that’s inverted? It’s not “the things you don’t want people to do; don’t do those to other people.” It is “the things that you would want people to do.” Now, that goes beyond just avoiding the problems. That’s a proactive, offensive kind of love—in the sense, in terms of football strategy at least—it’s not a defensive posture of making sure I don’t do anything hurtful; it’s “What are you doing that’s helpful? What are you doing to advance the cause in other people’s lives that you would want done in your life?” That takes a certain kind of thinking and pondering that we’ll get to in a minute.

He says, because when it comes to just natural love, here’s how he puts it in verse 32: “If you love those who love you,” if it’s just this reciprocal relationship, “what benefit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.” And that’s why, when you read the passage, for instance, in 1 John 4, you know, “anyone who loves is born of God,” and Jesus is admitting everybody has a form of love—it’s usually this kind of love. It’s a kind of love that’s a good investment, that comes back to them. They love those who love them. They love the lovable. They love those that make them feel good about loving. But verse 33, “If you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.” If because of that—whatever you call it, that love to people—it promotes you doing things that you know are the kinds of things that are simply the reciprocal relation of other people being good to you, what difference is that than anyone else? Verse 34: “If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, then what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount.” In other words, you could picture this ethic, and you can see it evident in street gangs in South Central L.A., you can see it in the penitentiaries: “If you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” If this is a winning kind of win-win relationship, if it’s a quid pro quo—“I do good to you; you do good to me”—if this is mutually beneficial, that’s most people’s definition of love, including even marital love, which is supposed to be the most Christlike kind of love—50/50.

Jesus says, I’m not looking to promote that. This is something radically different. So, matter of fact, it might even be—to use a different definition in verse 35—of “enemy” that we looked at last week. This is not the confiscation of people over you in authority. This is not suffering for your Christianity. This is the relationship here horizontally. It’s someone that I don’t even like—someone that I feel like is against me, someone who, if I was good to them, they’d never be good to me. Yeah, those are the kinds of people I’m asking you—even there—“love, love your enemy, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.” In your mind: I’m not doing it because it’s a mutually beneficial relationship. I’m willing to give, to sacrifice. And when you do that, the Bible says, “your reward will be great, for you will be sons of the Most High.” Now don’t miss this. I don’t know what background you come from, but some of you think if you do enough good things, then God makes you a Christian; you do enough good things, and then you get justified—to use a biblical word; you do enough good things and you become a child of God. That’s not what it’s saying here. Matter of fact, he goes on to clarify: the sonship in this particular passage is because



you're acting just like Dad. You're a chip off the old block, because "he is kind"—bottom of verse 35—"to the ungrateful and the evil." He acts in ways that are not about reciprocity. It's not about "I do good to you so you do good to me, and this is a mutually beneficial relationship." God's love is a kind that is very risky. It's not only risky, sometimes it's an all-out loser from the beginning. He gives and there's nothing coming back. He sacrifices and there's no real payoff to the investment.

That helps to define the word "love," and he uses a word here that helps us know what kind of love we're talking about. Verse 36, he calls it "mercy." "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." Now catch that word: merciful is giving something to someone that you know is not something they deserve. It's not something that is going to come back to me. It's that giving and kindness. It's that expression of myself that recognizes I'm not doing this because it's equality; I'm doing this as an act of just giving and sacrifice—mercy. Another word we like to use is grace. It's gracious. It's giving expecting nothing in return.

Now, that's the kind of thought we need to have at the end of every week: What kind of love did I demonstrate to my coworkers, my family members, my neighbors, the people that I interact with every week? Did I express this kind of biblical love? It's not a kind of love that says, "Did I just make sure I didn't do anything that I wouldn't want anybody doing to me?" That's the "golden rule," if you look at the secular research of it, that people count as the golden rule—but it's not the biblical Golden Rule. Let's look at it afresh. Verse 31: "As you wish"—the Greek word *thelō*, that word "desire"—what you think about is, "I'd really like this to happen." "As you wish that others would do to you," he says, now that's what you've got to think about, "and then do so to them."

If you're really going to understand the biblical version of the Golden Rule, which really is the only one that matters to us—what Jesus says love is—you're going to have to do what this text asks you to do, and that is to think about what you would want. See, and that gets you outside of yourself, and that's not always easy. It's a kind of, you know, self-analysis in terms of: What is it to me that I would prefer in every situation I look at as it relates to interpersonal relationships? When I go out on the patio and have a conversation, what kind of conversation would I like to have? What would I want someone to say to me? What kind of interest would I like them to take in me? Those desires—that's what I've got to then turn over, and it becomes the template of what I'm aiming at in this relationship.

That, number one, is us taking time to identify my preference for kindness. Let's just use the word "kindness," because love in this context, when we get down to see what it really looks like, is a kind act, a merciful act. That's what I'm looking at. And it's something that, you know, is not *quid pro quo*. It's not payback.

I was sick last week, and I thought at one moment—maybe because I was hungry; I’m always hungry when I’m sick; I’m always hungry when I’m not sick; I’m always hungry—but as I was sick there, and I was feeling kind of miserable, I had the thought: Wouldn’t it be nice to have just a big old bowl of homemade chicken noodle soup right now? My wife is busy—she’s off doing her thing—and I thought, “Wouldn’t it be nice?” And then you start to imagine: “It wouldn’t be great if someone just rang the doorbell right now with a big old crock of homemade—‘I heard you were sick, Pastor Mike. Here’s some chicken...’” Ah man, I went off on that thought for a while—“It’d be so nice.”

Now, to think about that in terms of what is the template of what love means for me—if someone really had shown up with a visit (didn’t happen; I’m sorry to report it), but if someone had shown up with that bowl—you know, that crock of chicken noodle soup—I would have said, “What a kind and gracious thing, for you made that for me because you heard of it. That is so kind of you. What a merciful act of love for you to do that for me. I mean, that’s amazing.” To think about that—“sure would be nice”—becomes now the template for how I should act in people’s lives. That’s going to change my behavior. That’s going to ask me at the end of the week: When you heard that so-and-so was ill, did you respond in a way that you would have wanted someone to respond to you? I’ve got to now think about how I want people to respond to me.

I talked about the uniqueness of the biblical Golden Rule. If you look at all the religious or ethical constructs that use this concept of reciprocity, or “How would you want people to respond?”—like I said, it’s usually stated in the negative. But even in the Old Testament, we have a positive statement that leads me to ask the question, “What do I want people to do?” in the old Leviticus command to love one another. And here’s the qualification: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Now, that’s a built-in kind of benchmark for us, because here’s the thing: when I am hungry and sick, and it’s within my power to provide something for myself, I will get up and meet the need. When I’m hungry, guess what? I feed myself. When I’m hurt, I console myself. When there’s an opportunity, I take advantage of it. When there’s an injustice, I try to make it right. When there’s a need, I try to meet it. See, all of these things in my life I naturally do without even thinking about it. I’m not even cognizant of the fact that I really care for myself. And in the Old Testament, back there in the day of Moses, the standard was set forth: now start to think about how you care for yourself. Think about how generous you are to yourself. Just think about how you work and sacrifice for yourself. You do that as the giver and the recipient.

Now, in the Old Testament God says, “Can you just think that way as you consider what it means to love your neighbor? How do you respond to a need when you have it? Now, if your neighbor has a need, respond the way you respond to yourself. When your neighbor is slandered, see, how would you respond if you were slandered? You’d want to fix that and correct the wrong or the rumor—do that for your neighbor.” And one of the illustrations in the playing out of “love your neighbor as yourself” is: if your neighbor’s oxen has gotten out and it falls into a ditch, the Bible says take that oxen, get it out, and return it to your neighbor. See, because myself—if my oxen (don’t have one, but you know what I’m saying) is in a ditch—I would want to get it out and bring it back home. It’s mine. Of course I don’t want it lost. I don’t want it wandering. I don’t want to lose the livestock in



my herds. Well, of course I'm going to do that for myself. But the Bible says, think about your neighbor, and do to your neighbor the things that you do for yourself and want done for yourself. And that's the principle here.

But he wants us to even think further—to get outside of “What would I want?” Even some of the things I don't do or I feel incapable of doing—make that the template. “So do to others.” I've got to think about what I prefer—my preference for kindness. It's great when I'm down to have somebody encourage me. It's great when I have a need to have someone help me meet it. It's great when there's a problem or, you know, there's some injustice, to have people help me make that right. I want to do that for others when they face those very same things. That has to be a pattern of thinking.

A couple things. Number one, I don't want you to dwell on that. This is part of the strategy God gives us to define love in our relationships all week long. If you spend time thinking about what I'd like people to do—like when I was sick this week and craving chicken noodle soup—I can sit there and spend the rest of the afternoon bemoaning the fact that no one brought me any. I can do that. I know people that all they do is think about how they want people to love them, and then they're all bummed out because no one loves them that way. You meet people like that; they're a real joy to hang out with, aren't they? You don't want to be one of those people. You don't want to make this your consuming concern: “Boy, people should talk to me more. People should really try to encourage me more.” Don't get into that. But we've got to start there. You get there to define it so that I can know that the whole point of thinking that through is to figure out how I'm supposed to treat other people this week. So don't get stuck there.

Secondly, some of you don't even want to think about it. You start to think about it, but even the prompt for me to say, “Would you think about how you want people to treat you?” or “Think about how you'd want people to treat you when you were sick,” you start thinking, “I don't want to think about that.” Because if you really think, “Oh yeah, that would be nice if someone just showed up at my door and rang my doorbell, and there they were, and they had that great homemade chicken soup, giving it to me—oh, that would be so great.” But then you say to yourself, “No, no, no, no, no, I'm not going to think that, and you know what, I certainly don't want that to happen.” You can't even imagine what it would take to define love for yourself, because you think if, you know, someone actually did that—here's where your mind goes next—“I wouldn't want that to happen because, you know what, then I'd have to pay them back. I don't want someone to take me to lunch today and pick up the tab, because if they pick up the tab, I'm not going to let them. I would feel indebted and obligated to pick up the tab next time.” You're always trying to keep score so that everything is equal, and because of that concern in your life, you don't even want to think about what it might be that would be an act of love. You avoid all that kind of thinking. You actually—here's the practical outcome—you isolate yourself. Matter of fact, you don't even want people to express kindness to you. You don't want anybody to help you move, you know, when you need people to help. You don't want that help, because if you can stay isolated, you can be self-contained, and you will never feel indebted to anyone.

I'm here to tell you when you think through this first point—which is identifying your preference for kindness—if you have an aversion to that because you know where that will take you, in terms of either feeling depressed that no one's doing it for you, or secondarily, "If any of that were to happen, I would feel indebted," I want to wipe that one off of your mind by taking you to one passage first—Romans 13. Please turn there real quick. Let me show you this.

In your mind, your game is, "I don't want to think about all this, you know, this interaction in the body of Christ with everybody serving and sacrificing for one another. I don't want to get caught up in that network, because then I'm going to be obligated to do this for everybody." Don't think that way. Here's why. Romans 13—just to get some context before I underline the punch line of this—look through the first six verses: all about the government. Remember this? Some of you were randomly taught through this in several weeks in a series about the government and our relationship to the government—one of the worst sermons that we hated. There was verse number 7, which is, "Oh, we've got to pay taxes." Even if the taxes are used for bad? Yes, got to be. Why? Well, because they're owed, given the nature of the relationship that you have as a citizen of the government. Even if you don't like the government, it says—now verse 7—"Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue"—which the Roman government was, you know, exercising on the people—"to whom revenue is owed; respect"—even if you think, "I don't think they're a great emperor"—"respect to whom respect is owed; honor to whom honor is owed." Settle the accounts.

Now you've got a division in your Bible, do you not? A paragraph break. And if you have an ESV you even have a heading there. Sometimes you have to ignore those to know that verse 8 is clearly tied to verse 7 and the end of this discussion. It's a transition, I get it, and I'm all for the paragraph breaks, but note what it says now: "Owe no one anything." In other words, you should not be, you know—your taxes are past due; you shouldn't be late on your mortgage; you should pay everything that is owed and you should pay it on time. You should be all paid up—"except"—that's a big word now; here's the part to highlight or underline—"except to love each other." You want me to be behind payments on loving each other? Absolutely. That's exactly what this text says. In other words, you are afraid to engage in this thing that I'm talking about, because if this starts to happen to you—or even if you define what it means for someone to love you—you will feel obligated. Here's what I'm saying: it doesn't take circumstances to obligate you. It doesn't take someone serving and bringing you chicken noodle soup to have you already indebted and owing that to other people. You are indebted because of the theology we'll look at later—because God has said, you're automatically indebted. All of you are indebted. You owe everyone love. You're past due on it.

And if you're a good, I don't know, financial manager—when you're past due on something, it bugs you; you've got to pay it. And the Bible says there will be a continuing debt for you to love people in the biblical way, which is for me to give without expecting anything in return—sacrificing for your good and your benefit. I'm always past due on that. I'm just trying to prevent you from anything—in your mind—being that isolationist, which in America, in 21st-century Western



culture, is so common. And for Christians today, we love it: “Don’t want to go to a home fellowship group; don’t want to get involved in people’s lives; don’t want to be in a discipleship program; don’t want to do any of that stuff. Just let me isolate here. I’ll be nice, and I’ll make sure I’m not mean to anybody.” You’re not fulfilling the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said you were called to love others, starting with an idea of what you would want others to do to you. And don’t sit here and tell me, “Well, I don’t want anybody to do anything good for me.” Stop that. You should imagine life as though everyone were doing all kinds of good things to you, and you now are indebted to repay them. That’s the motivation.

So think it through. How would you want people to love you? How would you want people to respond to you when you had a need, when you were depressed, when you were discouraged, when you had an opportunity—whatever the situation in life that you were facing? Now you’re going to see people that are in that same category. You know what to do, because you know what you’d want done. That’s the starting point for this discussion. Luke 6:31: “As you wish that others would do to you, so do to them.”

I guess before I leave this point, I should talk about my middle kid, who’s now got his driver’s permit—just a couple weeks ago. Successfully got through the first one—he’s got his license, you know—bravo. Now we’re on to the second one. And it’s funny, if you’re a parent of a teen or you were not long ago, you can remember what it’s like to sit there in the front seat and start to describe and explain things that you basically live with all the time, and you rarely articulate. And now you’re teaching your kid to drive, and driving is more than the kid just trying to get from point A to point B without crashing. I mean, really, there’s more to it than that. And you start to realize that by the things that he does or doesn’t do. And one of the things that I’m always concerned with is the things that I know irritate me as a driver—I don’t want my son to become that driver.

You’ve heard my rant about turn signals, have you not? No, you haven’t? Oh, don’t get me started on that. If you’re going to turn, would you let the rest of us know? That’d be just so helpful. There’s a way to do that. It’s a kind of a standardized, accepted way for us to realize your car’s going to turn here soon—use your turn signals. And then I recognize this: one of the things I really hate—and here’s another rant (I hate to rant again on this, but)—you know, in South Orange County here we’ve got the bike lanes on the roads, do we not? You see that solid white stripe? If you notice that, then all of a sudden when you get near the intersection, it’s broken, it’s dashed. If you notice that, you know what that means? That means that when you’re going to turn right at this intersection, you’re supposed to move your little car, your precious little car, over near the curb, so the guy behind you who’s not turning there can stay in his lane and pass you. Now I know that’s a huge inconvenience for you, because it’s so much easier to make that nice sweeping right-hand turn. But I’m behind you, and I’m in a hurry to get where I’m going, and you slow me down as you putz down and slow down, and you make your little right-hand turn because you don’t want to cross that little dotted line; you don’t want to get near the curb—“Oh, it’s too tight of a turn.”



I see now my kid's trying to learn to drive, and sure enough, I'm sitting there in the passenger seat—here comes the right-hand turn he's got to make—and you know what I'm yelling at him? “About the curb!” Why? Because one day I'm going to be driving behind you, John. I don't want to slow down before I get to this intersection, so I'm going to teach you to do the same.

It's like when I tell them to play golf—golf's some kind of a game with a lot of unwritten rules—but, you know, you try to teach them to be courteous golfers, especially in Orange County here; it's crowded golf courses. And you know this basic stuff—when you first take them on the golf course you teach them to shut up when the person is teeing off. Now, there's no sign about that. You know, this is not a PGA event, so you have to learn to do those things. Why? Because when you get up to golf, you recognize it doesn't help your backswing when someone's laughing and joking and talking. And then you get things like, you know, when you're done with the whole hole there—you holed out on the green—it'd be good for you not to start a neat little conversation while the guys are out there trying to hit up on the green. It'd be good if you didn't keep score, talk about the latest things—get off the stinking green, get in your cart, and leave so that we can hit, because I'm 190 yards out with my 8-iron and I want to hit—I want to hit the green! The golfers get that. (Not true—190 yards, 8-iron is ridiculous—that's you; I'm 130 yards.)

Do you see what I'm saying? You have to think outside yourself. See, and when you teach people certain things you recognize—to be a kind and courteous person is to recognize how your behavior affects others. You have to think outside of yourself. So identify your preferences for kindness. How do you like the foursome in front of you to respond when they're done putting out? How do you like the right-hand turner? How great would it be—make that your priority and live that way. Not just the stuff that would be ill-received in their lives, but even the things that would be a blessing to them.

Great. Compare that with what verses 32 through 34—Luke 6—is printed on your worksheet: “If you love those who love you, now what benefit is that?” No big deal—“even sinners do that.” “Do good to those who do good to you—what benefit is that?” Sinners do the same. “If you lend to those”—verse 34—“from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount.” In the penitentiary, as I said, love goes on in that definition all the time. If it is a mutually beneficial relationship, they're fine in doing good—loving, caring for, whatever, benefiting, sacrificing—as long as it's going both directions; as long as you're willing to have that be a mutually beneficial relationship. In this text, he says: that's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about mutually beneficial acts of love. I'm not talking about sacrificing or giving money if I know I'm going to get it back, or doing something that I know is going to come back to me. I don't even want you to think that way. It's worded that way.

Number two on your outline: we need to refuse to predict reciprocity. That's a good way to put it—refuse to even think about what might happen if I do this nice thing to them. “If I bring chicken soup to my sick pastor, what might he do for me?” I can't promise you a lot. But I don't even want



to think that way. Why? Because that's going to color whether or not I actually respond to the need. I'm going to make decisions if I'm always thinking reciprocity.

Now, I've talked about the dreaded honey-do list, which you guys all have, I would assume, right? If you're married like me, you own a house. And so mine, I've told you, is the little sticky pads on my dresser. And there's the dresser, the sticky pads, and, you know, some days—Monday is my off day—I get to Monday, and my dresser looks like a paper mountain. And there are all these things I'm supposed to do. Now I wake up on Monday morning, I see the honey-do list, and of course I've told you, I've confessed, the dread that I feel. "I don't want to fix that; I don't want to do that; I don't want to replace that; I don't want to go out there and do that in the yard." I see that, and I feel that sense of dread. But I know these are, you know, always ended by "Love you"—always have a nice little... And I recognize who they're coming from. Now, it is my loving wife that wants me to fix this thing in the kids' room. So I recognize, you know what, all I've got to do is think about it. I may feel the positive dread of, "Boy, I don't want to do this," but I recognize here, this is my wife. I mean, oh—interesting. Look at what she's done for you. Think of how she sacrifices for you. Think about how she serves you. Think about your life without her. Think of all the good things. So it's not hard. I can look at that list, and I can get over the anger or the pause or the dread of doing all those things because I think, "I know—she's been so good to me." Not to mention, with my optimistic view on my marriage, I think, "Hey, she's going to continue to be good to me." I know that if I'm good to her, she will continue to do these things. It's not a problem. She'll ask me to do something; if she needs me to stop somewhere, I can do it if I just get my mind and perspective.

And that, the Bible says, is not what Jesus wants us to think through—which I was tested on recently. I had my neighbor come to me, who had his water main that broke, and the water company says it's going to be a long time until they fixed it. So he knocks on my door and he says, "I'd like to borrow your water." I wasn't sure what that meant, right? Now, here's the thing: we're not like two peas in a pod. You know, I am a Christian pastor, which—you know, he is a Muslim from Iran, who I've talked to about Christianity, and he's not real keen on it. So, you know, we're not like having Bible studies together or anything. And so let's just start with that. That's just kind of the backdrop, so you can picture this scene. "I'd like to borrow your water." "What does that mean, neighbor friend of mine?" "Well, the water main is broken; they're not sure when they're going to fix it. I went to the hardware store, and he taught me a way that if I were just to plug into the spigot on the side of your house, I can put water all through my home. I can have water. Just let me siphon your water off the side of your house."

I looked at him just like that—trying... you know what I'm thinking. "I don't know that that's a smart idea for me. I don't know." I started thinking of all the things that might happen. I started thinking, "I pay for this water. How long did you say it would be until the water main was fixed?" "I don't know." "Okay." He doesn't know. I'm thinking, "Oh man, so this can be a long-term thing." You know, I've already had the water police out there—if you work for the water department, I'm sorry—but, you know, uptight about the water, how much we use and all that. And I recognize something—I can picture the guy in the little truck coming up and narking me now because my water usage has gone off the charts, because now I'm not only using my house and all

of its stuff, but now I'm supplying water to my neighbor. I started to think of all the ways this is going to cost me. And then it's easy to think, "Now who's asking me here? This isn't an associate pastor at the church. This isn't my wife." I start thinking, in my fleshly reasoning, "What have you ever done for me, man? I've never borrowed your water or your electricity. You want me to—utility—you want to tap into my utilities? For how long—for some undetermined period of time?" Okay.

That's the kind of thinking Jesus said I don't want you to do. Now, was it within my means to share my water? If my water bill doubled, could I afford it? If it were my electricity you wanted to tap into, I'm not sure I could afford it—I'd have to get a second job for that. But my water, I thought, "Okay, it's within my ability to meet this guy's need." What I need to stop thinking about is what good this will be for me—what he's done for me in the past; what do I think he's going to do in return. He's certainly not my buddy. We're not on the same page—politically, ideologically, religiously. I'm thinking you want to talk about someone who's on the other end of the spectrum, and you want me to give you this, and there's no real reason for me to do this for you. I think God wants me to say, "Yes, that's what you need to do"—to absolutely stop predicting reciprocity. Don't even think about it. Don't even give that thought. "Is it within your means to meet the need?" That's all you need to ask. And can you meet it? And if there's a need, you know what? Here's the thought you need to have, Mike—we've already dealt with this: If your water main was broken, and you had the prospects of trying to—"I don't know, a month"—and all your kids never showering—I don't know—it just wouldn't be... If I could go to the hardware store and have the guy tell me, "There's a way for you to siphon your neighbor's water," I think I would maybe knock on the door and say, "Hey, could I get... it would be great." If I had a solution and it was my next-door neighbor—see, I think that would be something I would want for me. That's all I need to think about—not reciprocity—and then be able to say, "Yeah, let me open up the gate and you can siphon my water." Which, by the way—I'm not here to brag—but I did it. And I've already confessed I didn't want to do it at first, and it was only for about a month, and he doesn't use that much water, I found that after all—they use a lot less than me. Or at least they did then.

Refuse to predict reciprocity. You know, why would I—how can I do that practically? In my mind, let me give you a couple things that may help. How about this: turn with me, if you would, to Ephesians 5. Here's the reason. I've already told you this, and I've introduced the principle: I am already indebted to love people. The logic in my mind is here. The logic in my mind is: if you want to think about it in terms of predicting reciprocity, that's a horizontal relationship—"What has this guy done for me?" When it comes to feeling indebted, the way I can get that in my mind, and how it makes sense, is to think vertically. That's what this text does.

Ephesians 5:1—are you with me on this? "Therefore be imitators of God"—and that's where our passage ends; we're going to get there in a second—"as beloved children." Even there—okay, I'm loved; I'm reminded that I'm loved—"and walk in love." Now let's get specific. He says, "as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God." Okay, Christ sacrificed—nothing in return. At least there's no equivalence; there's no mutually beneficial relationship in any equality here. He "gave himself up." Now you respond to that. It's like the text

says in 1 John 3:16. We know John 3:16; 1 John 3:16 says—and I am loved—let me quote it for you from memory... There we go: it says, “He laid down his life for us; therefore,” it says, “we ought to lay down our lives”—not for him, someone says—“no, lay down our lives for the brothers.” Because I’m looking vertically at how much God has given me, now that motivates me and gives me—that completes that picture of indebtedness. I am indebted to him; therefore I’m going to give to the brothers.

In other words, I can imagine giving him water as though he did give me water—not because he gave me water (my neighbor), but because God gave me water. If you think about that—God helped me qualify for the mortgage, God keeps me gainfully employed to pay the mortgage. God is the one who sent me... I mean, I get this stuff and can rightly credit God with it. Now, if I can just think of this—because God has been so good to me, I can feel the indebtedness now horizontally—I can give to him as though it is his Father—not by virtue of redemption, but by virtue of creation. His Father has given those things to me. Did you follow that? In other words, my neighbor—just because he’s a non-Christian Muslim guy—and because he’s created in the image of God, as a fellow human being on planet earth, I can give to him and make the connection that his Maker—his Father, by virtue of creation—has given me everything I have. And because he gave in such an unfair, unequal way—giving me, and I could never pay him back—the Bible says, now I can pay back this way.

Now look above this text—if you’re in Ephesians 5:1—look back up now in 4:31: “Let all bitterness”—why would I be bitter? Because you did something that made me mad—“and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” Why? “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” I should be willing to say, “All that I’ve received from God—I need to see and feel some indebtedness to express sacrificially good to others, even if there’s no reciprocity.”

Little sidebar on this. Let’s think the paradigm through. Jesus is pointing out equal reciprocity. If you think you can pressure reciprocity—you may do it. If you even predict reciprocity in your relationships—if you think, as an investor, “Will this investment pay back?”—if even that thought crosses your mind, if you predict that it’s low—“No, you know, this isn’t an equal, mutually beneficial relationship”—you will be tempted to withhold. And God says that’s wrong. If you predict that it’s high—I just want to address that real quick, because the Bible does. In other words, if my neighbor is, you know, the richest guy in Orange County (which—he’s never lived next door to me), but let’s just pretend—richest guy in Orange County lives next to me; knocks on my door: “Hey, Mike, I’d like to borrow your water. My water main is broken. Can I just siphon off your water for the next month?” See, I wouldn’t give it a second thought in my fleshly-ness. Why? Because I think, “Man, I’d like to have the richest guy in Orange County indebted to me. I lent him water. That would be great.” The Bible says that’s sinful. Why? Because it’s called partiality. James 2 is all about it. If you can, in your mind, gauge acts of kindness because you think reciprocity will be high, then you will engage in something the Bible says—making judgments about people, distinctions (the book of James says), with evil motives, evil thoughts, evil intentions. So I can’t.

If I know this—if in my mind I have no excuse for not being kind because it won't come back to me—and I'm warned that if I think a lot will come back to me, I'm doing it for the wrong motive—then the only solution to that is what? Just don't even think about reciprocity. Forget it. Don't predict it. If there's a need and I can meet it, because I love God and God has loved me, I'm going to meet that need—coworkers, family members, my wife, my children, my neighbors, people in my small group, people at church. I want to treat them as though I'm someone who would want to be treated in the same way, and it doesn't matter what would come back to me.

And he puts it in some stark terms in Luke 6:35—it's printed on your worksheet; let's close with this here: "But love your enemies." You may not be in a fight with your neighbor, and you may not consider them an enemy, but he uses that example. It's like in 1 John, talking about loving our brothers, and immediately it brings up an example of Cain and Abel. And here are two people that should get along, and they don't get along, and they were enemies—and one committed homicide against the other; there was a murder that took place. He says, "Don't be like them." So even in situations—we're not talking about persecution; we're not talking about the government in this context—we're talking about people that I'm just saying, "I have no reason that I would do..." Matter of fact, they're the people that are invoking in my life bitterness and clamor and all that—I'm angry at them—and the Bible says, it doesn't matter. Love the people that you'll get nothing back from. In other words, "enemy" is defined in this context as one who's not able to do anything in return, or won't do anything in return—refuses to. Like my neighbor, who didn't even offer to pay for it, by the way—I'm not trying to throw him under the bus; I'm just saying—it wasn't much. I realized he doesn't use much water, as I said. Love them anyway. Do good to them anyway. Lend to them anyway. And stop worrying about reciprocity—"expecting nothing in return"—"and your reward will be great." Why? "Because you will be sons of the Most High," for "He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

If reciprocity is not my measuring stick or the benchmark of my decisions as to whether or not I'm going to do this for the person, what is the measuring stick? Well, the text says here: God's kindness, God's love—God's merciful actions. Let's put it that way. Number three: we need to measure our kindness by God's. How kind is God? How generous is God? How does God worry about reciprocity or equality? He doesn't. He's kind to the evil and the ungrateful. And you may say, "Well, I shouldn't have done that; that guy didn't even say thanks. I bought that Christmas present—he didn't even send me a thank you." No—stop thinking that way. Because when you give and you don't care about the... you know, you don't care about reciprocity; you don't care about whether or not he bought the meal the next time—you just give without thinking anything in return about it—the Bible says you're acting like God. You're a chip—I say the "chip off the old block," because this is not about justification—becoming a child of God by earning it by acts of love. It is like Barnabas was called "the son of encouragement." Why? Not because his dad's name was "Encouragement." What is it about? It's about reflecting the character of encouragement—the embodiment of encouragement. When you do sacrificial acts of love without expecting anything in return, the Bible says you're acting just like God. You're "sons of the Most High," who is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Now, we don't have time to look at it, but it's worth jotting down—and let's look at it at the last service—Philippians 2. Go to Philippians 2 with me. If you're measuring your kindness and your acts of kindness, and whether or not you'll go the extra mile, stay the extra hour, or spend the extra dollar to love this person in that context—if you want to measure whether or not you should do that, you do it by how God acts. And God is always reminding us to what extent he goes to meet our needs. Christ died for us. He became obedient—even to the point of death on a cross. And that picture now is the template for us.

Now, if you glance at Philippians 2—especially like verses 6 through 11—you'll say, "Oh yeah, those are very familiar verses," and you study them in Christology class if you're here at the church, and you say, "Oh, this is the great central passage on the incarnation of Christ"—and it is. What you may miss is the reason this was put forward for us. Matter of fact, look at verse 4: "And each of you should look out not only for his own interests, but also the interests..." "All I care about is my water—my water." No, no—care for other people as well. "All I care about is whether I get my chicken soup when I'm sick"—no, no. Care about others as well—the interests of others also. And how am I going to regulate that? How should I think about this? Well, measure your kindness by God's kindness: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

Now, sandwiched in the middle of verse 35 in Luke 6 is that little phrase we kind of went over quickly: "and your reward will be great." Look at the next line in Philippians 2:9: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." Now, the word "therefore" is the important word. God the Father looks at the Son's amazing sacrifice—not caring about his comfort; saying in the garden, as it's put so poetically, "Not my will but yours be done," though we know his heart is "Let the cup pass from me if it's possible." This is a painful season of my ministry. It's the worst. But you know what? I'm willing to do this. Why? The Bible says because he wanted to redeem us—he loved the sheep—and the Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. And because of that, it says, "Therefore God highly exalted him." And the picture of reward cannot be missed in this.

And the reward is not just that you'll be like God and it'll be great and you'll feel good about yourself because you're doing a God thing—although there's some truth to that. It's that he rewards those people—actively rewards them. Remember the story in Matthew 19 when the rich young ruler came to Christ? And Jesus says, "Fine. I'm collecting a band of fishers of men who are going to go out and save people's souls. You know what? Take all your money—you don't need it now if you're going to join my band. Sell it all, give it to the poor, come and follow me, and we'll go do this thing." And the man said, "No." And the Bible says it's because he owned a lot of things—he wasn't willing to give it up. So you want to talk about a guy who wanted to maintain what he had—



that was the picture of it. Then Peter chimes in, in Matthew 19, and says, “Hey Jesus, we left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?” And you’d think you’d see like, “Ah, come on, just do it—don’t worry about the reward.” That’s not what Jesus says. He turns around and he looks Peter in the eye and he says, “Yeah, you want to talk about rewards? I’ll tell you about it. Those of you that left these things for me—you went out there to love people because I’ve commissioned you to do it, and you’re giving things up and you’re sacrificing just like I am—you know what? You twelve, you’re going to be sitting on the twelve thrones, and you will be administrating”—the word is “judging,” but administrating—“the twelve tribes of Israel.” And then he says, I just want to make sure that the people who read this for centuries don’t think this is just about the twelve. He says, “And anyone who’s left anything for me”—you sacrifice something—goes on to say later, even a cup of cold water to love somebody—he said, “Anybody who’s given up anything—they’re going to receive,” he puts a number out there, “a hundred times as much.” A hundred times as much. And not only that—it’s the moniker of real Christianity: “and eternal life.” Those are my real Christians that are willing to love like I told them to love.

Now, you want to talk about the fact that we’re not thinking about reciprocity and we don’t want to see people and our love for them as an investment—I mean, at some point, when you look vertically, I guess God wants to motivate us with this: “Your reward will be great.” If I do give to people because God has given to me, and I let go and sacrifice and stay the extra hour and spend the extra dollar and go the extra mile—out of love for God and love for them, as an expression of love for them—the Bible says God is there with his little...I don’t know—just picturing, you know, an adding machine—adding up for us all kinds of rewards. Which, by the way, if you still have Philippians 2 open, you’ll see there in the first couple verses—it’s not just then and there, although the rewards are going to pile up for you and God is going to compensate you richly for every sacrifice you make—but even now, when the church starts doing this, look at verse 1. I mean, he’s motivating them by what happens when we actually have the mind of Christ that he talks about: “encouragement”—encouragement in Christ; “comfort from love”; “participation”—it’s the Greek word *koinōnia*, or “fellowship.” Man, that feels good. “Affection, sympathy.” Oh man, if there’s any of that, “then make my joy complete”—keep going—“being of the same mind, same love, full accord and one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition”—don’t be worried about yourself or payback—“or conceit”—that you think you’re better than everyone else—“but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves.” It’s another way to state the Golden Rule, if you would.

You want to talk about the fact that if we really got to work on loving each other the way Jesus told us to—man, there wouldn’t be a single person in need unmet. I mean, the church would be full of expressions of sacrificial love. It would be the kind of thing where people wouldn’t isolate and keep to themselves. People got involved in a network of giving—man, the church would be full of—look at the words—encouragement, comfort, *koinōnia* (fellowship, participation), affection, sympathy. That’d be the kind of church I want to go to. “Do good, lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great.” Not only that, you’ll reflect the character of God. So be merciful. Be kind. Be loving. Be gracious—even as your Father is.



You know, on weekends we do the baby dedications. It's easy to think like a dad and to think about, you know, what do you want for your kids? And I certainly pray about it. We get all these families up here on the weekend; we pray for their future and think about just the heart of a parent for a child and the aspirations they have. There was a discussion yesterday in women's ministry—this came up—but I thought about, you know, what is a godly anticipation or hope or aspiration for our kids? Average Orange County parent would say, "I just want my kid to be happy," right? And unfortunately, with that answer you get all the things that the culture says constitute happiness: good job, good income, security, good home, good relationships—all these things that work out right—good health. But the Bible says none of that really matters. I mean, really, if you want to think beyond just what the goal is—and the goal is to be like Christ—you think about what that brings long term. I mean, that's real happiness and real fulfillment and real pleasure—eternal pleasure and eternal fulfillment. I mean, that needs to be the focus. And the goal as a parent is: I want my kids to be like God in terms of their character and their attitude. I want my kids to be like Christ. I mean, there's nothing better; there's no higher—really—compliment than that.

And as you think about greatness—unless you're reading Forbes magazine—if you're really just thinking about people in your life who you thought were great—it could be your parent, or your grandparents, or whoever—you don't say, "Well, they had so much in their bank account." I mean, you don't think about how many civic rewards they received, right? It's about how they loved, how they sacrificed, how they served. I mean, that's how greatness is even intuitively defined by people that have the Spirit of God in their lives. And I'm saying, if we would really want that on our best day for those around us, shouldn't that be our aspiration? In other words, to flip it over where we started—if you look back on your week at the end of this week, I mean, the goal isn't to say, "Well, I want to be successful, and what that means is this, that, and the other; and I guess spiritually, I just don't want to offend anybody or be unloving." Man, let's wrap all those together. It's not about avoiding being unloving. It's not about making sure we're not mean. It's about flipping that over and recognizing the whole purpose of my life is to reflect Christlikeness—to be imitators of God as beloved children; to exercise that kind of love in those around me. That's real success. And you know what? Avoiding the wrong—that'll take care of itself. I've got to focus on being the kind of person that is willing to sacrifice like Christ. And in practical terms—I like to say it, but—I mean, it really comes down to your time, your money, your effort—going the extra mile, spending the extra dollar, staying the extra hour.

Good for us to see that as the goal. Paul looked at people—very imperfect—the church at Corinth—and he said, "You know what? I most gladly then spend—and be expended—for your souls."

Would you stand with me? I'll dismiss you and pray for you, as I hope maybe we can shift some of our ambition this week as Christians to not just try to stay out of trouble, but to see some measurable advances in the way that we sacrificially love people in our lives.



Let's pray. God, easy to talk about, I suppose—in theory at least—to analyze a text and to think about the Golden Rule—the real Golden Rule, the real biblical standard of Christian love. It's another thing to get out there on the patio and start doing it—be able to, this week, in our workplace with our coworkers, in our neighborhood, or with our families, just begin to think more consciously about the reality of what it means to not just avoid unloving things, but to really go after defining love in that unique Christian way. And God, I know that's going to mean sacrifice. It's going to be tossing the whole idea of mutually beneficial relationships out the window. It's going to be about an indebtedness that we see and feel and sense in our relationship with you—knowing you've given us so much. And because you've given us so much, we want to give to the people around us that, in one way or another, are always connected to you. Obviously the body of Christ—they're redeemed, they're forgiven, they're your kids—and to give to your kids, even if they irritate us, or there's someone in that bunch that bothers us—how important for us to recognize that because you're their Father, we are ready to respond. And even our non-Christian neighbors and our non-Christian coworkers—whoever we might be thinking about—even by virtue of the fact that you are the God who has made people in your image—important for us not to be close-handed toward those folks; to recognize that because of your provision in our lives, if it's within our means to meet a need or to respond or encourage or—whatever it might be—fix a problem, we want to be ready to do that without any thought of reciprocity. So God, make us more loving in this community, more loving in our church, more loving in our families, that it might be the hallmark of real Christianity in our life and in our church. We commit ourselves to that task afresh today. May your Spirit make it the reality for us as he works in our hearts. I know that's really the key—to be a new creation in Christ—and without it, we're hopeless to really meet any of these standards. So God, we rely on the work of your Spirit in our hearts. And for those among us that maybe aren't even Christians yet—I pray today, I pray that today might be a day they grapple with eternal issues of heaven and hell and embracing the Lordship of Christ and putting trust in the finished work of the cross. And for those of us that have done that, God, I pray it'd be a great day of just reawakening a passion for these things in our lives. Dismiss us now, God, to practice these things. In Jesus' name, amen.