

Life on Mission: The Greatest Commandment

Rob Rogers July 10, 2022

Introduction

Today we're beginning the third portion of our summer sermon series.

Jesus gives us an invitation.

Matthew 4:19

“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Jesus is giving all of us a mission right here...

1. **“Follow Me”** know me, center your whole life on me.
2. **“I will make you”** in other words, I will change you... I'm going to mold you and shape you, more and more into My image.
3. Third, what is he going to make you? A **“fisher of men.”**

PERSONAL: For Father's Day, Misty sent me on a fishing charter in northeast FL. My brother-in-law and I ended up reeling in a 4ft black tip shark. One of the things that you know if you have any experience with fishing is if you're going to be successful, you have to have an enormous amount of knowledge about what fish you're looking to catch, what kind of bait those fish are attracted to, where they tend to congregate, what time of day they like to feed, what type of tackle you need for the different type of fish. What's so great about a charter is literally you just show up, plop down on the boat, and do absolutely nothing until you see the tip of one of those rods twitch — and then you have all the fun reeling it in.

PROBLEM: One of the problems in the western church today is we expect Jesus to be our fishing charter. Or the pastor, or the professional church people. Maybe we don't say this out loud, but there is often this mindset of, *“You do all the work, you gain all the understanding, you just give me all the equipment I need and I'll just plop down and do nothing until someone shows up on my doorstep begging me to lead them to Christ.”*

However, if you're a follower of Jesus, His desire is that you would be intentional about LIVING ON MISSION.

Acts 17:22-27

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, **having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,** ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He is actually not far from each one of us.

**THE SUPREME COMMAND
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD
THE SIMPLE INVITATION**

The Supreme Command

In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked by an expert in Hebrew law, *“Of all the commands we’ve been given, of every single instruction we’ve ever received from God... if you could boil the Hebrew law, the Ten commandments, the entirety of the Old Testament down to single commandment, which, do you say, is the most important? Which is the most important?”*

Now, if you’ve grown up in the church, or been a part of any church, from almost any period of time, you know the verse I’m about to read. You know Jesus’ response... maybe you could even recite it verbatim... but here’s the problem: it’s familiar.

But I want you to stop for a moment and think. As Paul said to the people of Athens, *“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, the One who gives to all mankind life and breath — the God who is not distant and uncaring, but this all powerful, majestic, royal being who knows and cares about the tiniest details in our lives — is about to tell us what He has built in to the world as THE most important thing we could even live out. He says this is number one! If you could sum up the Old Testament, all of the law and the prophets, all the commands of scripture are summed up right here...”*

Jesus says the greatest commandment is this...

Mark 12:30-31

“...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

When you first read this, it’s easy to think, “Well, Jesus actually gave us two commandments here. 1. Love God. And 2. Love People.

And what’s true is we either lean to one side or the other.

You might be one who says, *“Okay, I’m going to spend an enormous amount of time and energy in private devotion and discipline as I seek God. I’m going to go into my room and pray privately, I’m going to wake up early and read scripture for hours, and I’m going to fill my life with God and His Word. And it’s sort of just me and Jesus. But when it comes to loving people, being gracious and generous toward others, when it comes to sacrificially laying down my comfort, my pleasure, my entertainment, my life for the sake of my neighbor... Yeah, I’m just not going to do that. Or at least I’m not going to be intentional about it.”*

On the other hand, some of us are socially active. We are incredibly intentional about loving people. Looking for opportunities to bless people. We’re engaged in the problems out in the world, we’re a part of activist groups, and we’re constantly helping and serving others because we know we should. But if we’re honest, we’re not really intentional or disciplined in our devotion toward God, and therefore our service to people only lasts so long. We exhaust ourselves, or we’re just simply showing people kindness without the spirit of God fueling us—and so our efforts are either in vain, or they only last until our generosity has reached its limit.

*But the commandment to Love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves... **these are not two separate or isolated commandments.***

Jesus is telling His followers this simple truth. **Your love for God is revealed by your love for people. And your love for people is fueled and sustained by your intimacy and friendship with God!**

In other words, **if you don't have intentionality in your love for people, you don't actually love God.** However, even if you do "love people," that doesn't necessarily mean you love God.

Think of it this way, *if you're showing love to people so that you can get something from them, you're not loving them — you're loving yourself.* If you love people so that at the end of the day you can say, "I excelled at loving people today, and now they must know how much I love God," you're actually still not loving them, you're loving yourself.

But if you can say, "God, I see how far you went for me, in the grand scheme of the universe a tiny little speck of dust, here today, gone tomorrow — You came for me so that I could be welcomed into your family. You saw me when I was helpless, rebellious — and you left heaven, you laid down all your rights and privileges, your power, your life, everything you gave for me.

John 1:14 says that God moved into the "neighborhood" so that you might see His glory, his generosity.

And you say "God, I see all of that, and because of all You've done, because You first laid down your life for me, God I'm laying down my life for you."

And He looks at you and says, *"Good — the way you express your love for Me is by laying down your life for your neighbor and expecting nothing in return. Love them as you love yourself. You feed you. You serve you. You satisfy you. You work for you. You strive and toil for you. Now, look at all I've done for YOU, now you can do it for them empowered by my Holy Spirit, love THEM as you love YOU! Love your neighbor as yourself."*

"God is very good at designing things this way: our faith is revealed by our works ([James 2:18](#)), our creeds are revealed by our deeds ([Luke 6:46](#)), and our love for him is revealed by our love for others ([1 John 4:20](#)). He makes it very hard for us to fake it."¹

~ Jon Bloom

You can't love God and not love people.

***You will love people best,
when you love God most.***

The way the world defines love and the way God defines love are two very different things.

The world says, "If you don't, not just tolerate, but celebrate my LIFE choices, then you don't love me. If you disagree with me in any way whatsoever, then you don't love me."

But **1 John 4:8** tells us that **God is love.** And Jesus being the perfect expression of God's love, we know is filled with "Grace & Truth."

God models for us the outworkings of love by His **grace** toward sinners and zealots, while never compromising on the **Truth**. But He never once used Truth as a weapon, He never used TRUTH to intimidate or bully others. There was not one confrontation with the Pharisees that was motivated by jealousy — but only by the hard truths he delivered, and the empathy and compassion he modeled. **Everything Jesus said and everything Jesus did was motivated by what was best for the other person. THAT IS HOW GOD DEFINES LOVE!**

So Jesus says, **Love God with all you've got. Love your neighbor as yourself.**

¹ Jon Bloom. *Not by Sight* (Crossway, 2013)

How can you love your neighbor, if you never talk to them?
How can you love your neighbor if you don't know their name?
How can you love your neighbor, if you hide in your house all winter?

The Sovereignty of God

A number of years ago, a man named Dave Runyon and a friend of his went with a group of 30 pastors to ask law enforcement, the mayor, other city officials what their city in Colorado needed.²

They were going to come up with these big plans that their church was going to tackle that next year. The Mayor listed all these different ideas and programs that were serving different demographics, elderly, disabled, orphans, impoverished people, disparity of equality among different races, all these HUGE social issues that needed funding and volunteer support — all good things. The pastors made a list of everything, because they were determined that after this meeting this city was going to change.

And at the end of the meeting, almost in passing, the mayor, who was not a believer, said, “*You know, if you really want to change this city for the better, if the church really wants to make an impact here, **you ought to just start a neighboring revolution.***”

*Here's Dave and his buddy, two pastors, that while they were trying to build the “**next big thing,**” this one simple comment exposed the fact that not only them, but the other 30 “church leaders” in the room were failing to fulfill the simplest, yet most important thing Jesus commanded them to do.*

PERSONAL STORY:

My father-in-law Bob and I were about to make a huge mistake that involved a chainsaw, a large unhealthy tree, a couple of houses, and some power lines. This tree sat at the front corner of our property and was growing into our power lines. There was a narrow area where we had to drop this tree — between my house and my neighbor's house.

We'd already cut down a portion of the tree safely, when all of sudden the neighbor, Mike, from across the street comes running out waving us down yelling “Don't do it!” He tells us that this particular tree is incredibly dangerous to cut down, has been known to splinter, and fragment in unpredictable ways. So, we ended up not risking anyone's life and left the tree alone.

But then, Mike then tells us that the neighbor right next to us — the neighbor's house who we were in danger of hitting with the tree, was a professional lumberjack for the previous 60 years.

To my shame, I'd been living next to this guy for over a year and had no idea what he even did for a living for the majority of his life.

Maybe you can identify with that or maybe you're just a way better “Christian” than I was.

Acts 17:26

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place...”

- In other words, the time that you are living in, and the place where you currently live, your apartment, your house, your subdivision, your neighborhood, your city — wasn't only chosen by you. It was actually appointed by God Himself. It was appointed for you to live where you live in this specific time in human history! It is not an accident!

² Jay Pathak, Dave Runyon. *The Art of Neighboring*. (Baker Books, 2012)

Why would God do this?

Acts 17:27

“...that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.”

What is God’s perspective on the place you call home?

It is a resource that He has entrusted to you so that you might utilize it to draw the people around you toward Him.

Church, is it possible?

Could it be that not only has God placed you where you live on purpose — but also that God has specifically chosen who your neighbors were going to be before you ever moved to where you live now?

The Simple Invitation

God’s simple invitation to you through the greatest commandment is this:

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR, AND CARE ABOUT THEM.

After I almost demolished my neighbor’s roof and power lines, I spent some time with him. He had a different tree fall down in his yard during a big storm, Bob and I went over and spent some time helping him cut it up, we had a burn pile, and in the afternoon we just sat back and learned about this guy’s life — he’s 80 years old and is going to town on this enormous tree with his chainsaw.

Not long after, I was back over there and he suddenly began to tear up. He began to share about his brother who recently passed away — that he was married once — that he had a son who was mad at him for reasons he didn’t fully understand, and that he had a granddaughter that he loved so much that he never got to see. Soon after we began talking about the Lord, about reconciliation with his son — not long after he was able to reconnect with him and his granddaughter — he dug out this old Bible he had when he was a kid.

30 ft. from my door was a lonely old man struggling to come to grips with how his life had turned out. All it took was just a little bit of time, a little bit of intentionality, and we began to build a friendship that led to some significant conversations about Jesus. He has since passed, and I wish I knew with certainty where His relationship with the Lord was before He did.

Here’s what’s true of all of us: You have neighbors, just like I did, that are lonely, isolated, hurting, filled with regrets, that need to know that somebody sees them and cares about them.

Well, Rob, not everyone is facing hardship...

- You’re right. *But everyone will at some point.* And the simple seeds that you sow now could pave the way for significant spiritual moments later.

Q: When you pull in your driveway, instead of just waving and closing the garage door... or hurrying into your apartment... or avoiding your neighbor on a walk... ***what might begin to happen if you were to stop and engage with them and have a conversation.*** To get to know them.

Well, Rob, you don’t know how busy I am. That’s not as easy as you’re making it sound.

Here’s where I needed to get honest with myself — and maybe you do to.

In Jesus own words, the greatest commandment requires that I love my neighbor. Can I love my neighbor if I don't know them? If I don't get intentional about knowing my neighbors, can I bless them? Can I serve them if I don't know what they care about or what their needs are?

If we are unwilling to prioritize and keep what Jesus says is the greatest commandment — ***then what that means is that we don't really love Jesus.***

- Maybe, you're in a season where you're the one that needs to be cared for. That needs time for healing, and rest. And so, there is a fine balance between self-care (loving yourself) and living on mission. That's why Jesus doesn't say, "love your neighbor more than yourself." He says, "love your neighbor AS you love yourself."

We have to be careful that we're not moving into codependence or viewing our neighbors as projects. David Howell and I were chatting last week, and he said something that struck me. We were talking about physical, emotional health, and he said this... "Living healthy not about making these HUGE investments or taking HUGE swings at it — it's about making small consistent deposits over a long period of time that makes the difference."

Last week, the mission was about the broader community... *today we're zeroing in on your neighborhood.* Because you don't have to go overseas to live on mission.

Just imagine with me for a second, that you and your roommates or your family... ***what if you began to pray and look for opportunity to know and love your neighbors?***

What if every single person who claimed to be a follower of Jesus started moving toward becoming better/more *intentional* neighbors?

And just to be clear, I'm not necessarily talking about evangelizing people — I'm talking about knowing them, caring about them, because they are made in the image of God. Just LOVING PEOPLE, allowing the Holy Spirit to create the moments that share Christ.

Is it possible that God has not called us to something BIG, but to something small? *Is it possible that God wants to infuse His spirit into ordinary moments with ordinary people, serving an extraordinary God?* So often we want to do something BIG!!! **When what God is actually asking of us is faithfulness in something small.**

Last week we started with business cards, t-shirts, and stickers to spark simple conversations with people out in the community. But here's where we're going to go this week. One simple step.

- If you want to love your neighbors, pray for them.
- If you want to care for your neighbors, pray for them.
- If you don't like your neighbor, pray for them.
- If you're jealous of your neighbors — repent, and then pray for them.
- If your neighbor's dog poops on your lawn, pray for them!
- If you've forgotten your neighbor's name, pray for them anyway.
- If you want to follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus, and live on mission with Jesus — start fulfilling the greatest commandment not by doing something big, but by doing something small, and simply pray for them once a day.
 - Set a reminder in your phone, write their name down, or their address if you don't know their name. Prayer walk your neighborhood.
- And begin to look for the opportunities God is giving you to know and love the people he's surrounded you with.

After all, God determined the allotted periods of time and the boundaries of your dwelling place, that those around you that are far from God would feel their way toward Him and find Him. Because He's closer than you (and they) might think.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever expected Jesus to be your fishing charter — to do everything for you, with your doing nothing except for waiting for “the fish to jump in the boat”?
2. Do you lean more toward “loving God” or “loving people”? What do you need to do to balance out the commandment?
3. Discuss: “If you don’t have intentionality in your love for people, you don’t actually love God.” AND “Even if you do ‘love people,’ that doesn’t necessarily mean you love God.”
4. How does the world’s definition of “love” differ from God’s definition of “love”?
5. What is God’s perspective on the place you call home?
6. Which specific neighbor(s) can you become intentional about — learning who they are and how to care about them?

NOTES