

Positively Speaking

By Mark Wilson

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Loving Your Nearest Neighbor

Recently, in church, I've been preaching on the Great Commandment, which is love in two parts:

1. "Love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength."
2. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

It's interesting that this is called the Great Commandment, because by its very nature, love cannot be commanded. How can force another person to love? The threat of force normally accompanies a command:

"Stop, in the name of the Law!"

"Quit whining or I'll give you something to whine about!"

"If you don't come to work on time tomorrow, you're fired!"

Commanding and loving just don't fit together at all. If someone declares, "You HAVE to love me or else!" or "I DEMAND that you love me!", it pushes the other person the opposite direction. Authentic love is never commanded or demanded.

In light of this, there is only one way "The Great Commandment" makes sense. It happens through personal demonstration.

The only way love can be commanded is through the example of overwhelming love. We love God because He FIRST loved us!

We are called to love our Creator with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, because He loved us that way first. God invented the whole thing by loving you first, with all His heart – the greatest and deepest love that a human can imagine. He loves you with all His soul – at the very essence of His being, pure unbounded love! He loves you with all His mind – the Creative Mind which created all other minds – the source of ALL wisdom, knowledge and understanding! God loves you with all His strength, a magnificent, limitless power beyond all comprehension!

Since God loves us like that, we can't help but loving Him back! His overwhelming love for us commands our love in response.

And then, we are called to love our neighbor like that too!

Who is your neighbor? Any fellow human being qualifies as a neighbor. Anybody in need is a neighbor. Any person you come across is your neighbor. A neighbor can live across the street, around the world, or even in your own home.

Maybe you should start with the neighbor who is closest to you – your companion. This is the person you are "at home" with; the one who watches television with you, laughs together with you, or shares your bed. This neighbor is the one with whom you are most likely to share your meals and your heartaches and your frustrations. This person knows your faults, flaws and fears.

What does it mean for you to love this person with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Here are some questions for you to ponder as you consider how to deeply love your nearest neighbor – the person who is closest in your life:

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- 1) **Heart** -- Am I tuned in to how my companion is doing emotionally? What can I do to help bring joy, peace and pleasure into his/her life? Does my partner need attention? Space? Support?
- 2) **Soul** -- Am I deeply tuned in? Am I available to listen and understand my companion? Am I safe enough for him/her to share at the deepest level? Do I know my partner's deepest longing? Greatest hope? Biggest fear?
- 3) **Mind** -- How can I deepen and enliven our conversations? Do I know what makes my companion tick? When is the last time we've really laughed together? Have we explored the riches of each others' thoughts, ideas and opinions without argument?
- 4) **Strength** -- How have I served my companion lately? Is there something I could do, physically, which would show my love and commitment to him/her? When is the last time I have gone out of the way, and put my own desires aside to serve my companion? What have we done lately just for fun? Are there unfinished tasks that should be completed as a demonstration of love? How does my schedule reflect my commitment?

Hayward Wesleyan Church

10655 State Rd. 77 · Hayward, WI 54843

Phone: 715-634-4613 · Fax: 715-634-7823 · Website: www.haywardwesleyan.org