

“DARE TO CARE!”
by Rom A. Pegram (6/11/17)

Folks, I want to begin today with the DARE TO BE GREAT CHALLENGE that we started with last week. Are you ready?

A GREAT COMMITMENT TO THE GREAT COMMANDMENT AND THE GREAT
COMMISSION DONE WITH GREAT COMPASSION WILL GROW A GREAT
CHURCH!

Did you get that? Do you remember this from last week? *A great commitment to the great commandments and the great commission done with great compassion will grow a great church!* And you know what else? It'll grow a great Christian, too! How many of you want to be great in God's eyes today? [Let audience respond...]

Last week, we began with this challenge. And this series is built on these three great statements that Jesus made in scripture ... and called GREAT. So, let's go back to the first one, The Great Commandment(s), as we turn to Matthew 22 (34-40, NLT)...

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” ³⁷ Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

So, it's *the second and equally important* commandment that we're going to turn to today... Again, “A second is equally important. Love your neighbor as yourself.” Now, where did Jesus get this from? He got this one from the Old Testament—his scriptures—too. And it comes from Leviticus 19:18. But, here at Trinity UMC, the big question is not ‘Where did Jesus get that from?’ The big question is ‘How do we live it out?’ How do we really live out this ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ command? Well, to help us live it out today, I want to teach you or remind you of another story in scripture, from Luke 10:30-37—the story of *The Good Samaritan*. But, first let me begin here...

Several years ago now, there was a study done at Princeton University, up in New Jersey. And the study they did was about this story of The Good Samaritan. They have a seminary there at Princeton—where they train people to be pastors (and I want you to keep that in mind)—and they used those students for this study. So, here's what they did...

They asked each of these students to prepare a talk based on the story of The Good Samaritan. So, they were to prepare this talk, get ready to present it, and then they'd be called on the day of the talk, then given the time they were to present it...

On the day of the presentation, one-third of the seminary students were told they had plenty of time to make their presentation, one-third were told they had just enough time, and the final third were told they'd be late, so they had to hurry. You get the idea...

So, here's the scenario. On their way over to present their talk based on the story of The Good Samaritan, every one of them were to pass by someone who was slumped over in a doorway; they were coughing and could hardly breathe—obvious they needed help. Are you with me? As they were going to deliver their talk on The Good Samaritan, each one of them would have the same kind of opportunity... So now I want you to check out the results with me:

- FIRST GROUP (early) – 63% stopped to CARE for the person in need...
- SECOND GROUP (right on time) – 45% stopped to CARE for the person in need...
- THIRD GROUP (late) – only 10% stopped to CARE for the person in need...

Need I remind you *these are future pastors*? So, which group would you want to be in? I'm guessing most of us would want to be in that 10% of the third group who stopped to care—no matter what's going on in their lives, they'd stop to care! Isn't that what *we'd* want?

So, if that's the case, *how do we live this out?* The answer can be found in Jesus' story of The Good Samaritan—Luke, Chapter 10... Let's share in this together; would you follow along with me (Luke 10:30-37, NLT)?

Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. ³¹ "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. ³² A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. ³³ "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. ³⁴ Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' ³⁶ "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. ³⁷ The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

Now, that's compassion, isn't it? Or another word for what happened here would be **MERCY!** Because this is really what **MERCY** is, folks—*love in action!* And Jesus says, '...now go and do the same.' So, how do we show **MERCY**? How do we show *love in action*? How do we **DARE TO CARE**? Here're 4 ways to love your neighbor. We're to...

ENCOURAGE WHEN SOMEONE IS HURTING. The prophet Isaiah (35:3-4a) gives us a great picture of what needs to be done here—how to show **MERCY** to others: "With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have

weak knees. ⁴ Say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you.’”

Isaiah gives us 3 examples of people who need encouraging: Those with ... tired hands, weak knees, and fearful hearts... Let me expand on this just a bit: For those with tired hands: These are the folks we meet who are *physically exhausted*; how can we come alongside them to give them a hand (and not *applauding* them for *their* efforts!)? For those with weak knees: This could be someone who’s *emotionally weak*; they’re overwhelmed at the moment; be there for them to unload on or offer a word of encouragement to keep them going! And for those with fearful hearts: This is someone who’s *spiritually struggling*; you may need to pray for this person ... or remind them of how much God loves them!

Encouragement, folks, is one of the reasons the Church exists! We’re here because life’s tough and no one needs to go it alone! We want to be the kind of church that encourages one another to take the next steps...

Here’s my challenge to you right now. Can you take a few moments this week to OPEN YOUR EYES to your neighbors, to get outside yourself, and to encourage someone? You have no idea what a huge impact you could make on their life (*Check out Hebrews 3:13, NIV*)! Here’s the next way you can *love your neighbor...*

DIRECT WHEN SOMEONE IS LOST. I know this is very difficult, fellas, but stay with me, would you? It’s not like asking for directions when you’re lost; when the Bible talks about directing those who’re lost, it’s about *correction*—giving correction & helping people find their way back to God—to God’s will. So, how do we do this?

Take a look at Luke 17:3 (MSG) with me, where it says, “Be alert. If you see your friend going wrong, correct him....” So, first of all... **BE ALERT** to your neighbor’s condition. Have they been making wise decisions? Or have their decisions in life been less than wise? Sometimes, it’s easier to just let people we know make the bad decisions, then be there to encourage them afterwards, instead of having what may be an uncomfortable conversation in the first place—a conversation that may have saved them some pain... We need to BE ALERT, to begin with, of the condition of those around us...

And secondly, I want you to look at 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV) with me. It says, “...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” So, **ALWAYS BE PREPARED.** The Bible teaches us to always be ready to give directions to others who seem to be lost—not going the way of God, not preparing for their eternity, etc. So, ALWAYS BE PREPARED TO ... DIRECT when someone has lost their way—spiritually speaking... Here’s another way to *love your neighbor.*

GIVE WHEN SOMEONE NEEDS HELP. I want to give you one scripture to help you see how God feels about this: Proverbs 14:21 (MSG) says, “It’s criminal to ignore a

neighbor in need, but compassion for the poor—what a blessing!” If you know of a neighbor in need ... and don’t do anything about it (if you can), *IT’S CRIMINAL!*

I don’t know if you’ve heard of this or not, but many cities are actually enacting what they call the ‘Good Samaritan law’ and what this Good Samaritan law says is this: People are supposed to step up and do the right thing and to protect others sometimes, if they see someone obviously in need. And, if a judge determines that someone has not ‘done the right thing’ by someone in need, it could be considered a crime!

And so God says there are times when we really need to step up and do the right thing, too! We might not get punished, but we will miss out on God’s blessing when we fail to act. Proverbs 11:25 (MSG) says this (and say it with me): “The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.” Notice this isn’t the world’s economy, folks. With the world, whatever you give, you usually get the same back. But with God’s economy, when we give ... we always get back more than we gave! (AN EASY WAY TO GIVE IN THIS WAY ... would be to lend a hand when we do our Community Thanksgiving Meal this November.) Here’s the final way to *love your neighbor...*

FORGIVE WHEN SOMEONE LETS YOU DOWN. Just to recap: We show MERCY to our neighbors when we 1) *encourage* when they’re hurting, 2) *direct* when they’re lost, and 3) *give* when they’re in need; now we come to the last way to show MERCY (and I’m only going to touch on this, because there’ll be a whole series in the near future on this very topic)—*FORGIVE WHEN SOMEONE LETS YOU DOWN!* Here’s a way we can *love our neighbor* ... that God has repeated over and over...

Now, this may be the most difficult step of all we’ve talked about today, but let me begin by giving you *two unalienable truths* about ‘let downs’: First, *PEOPLE WILL LET YOU DOWN*—it’s unavoidable. Second, *YOU’LL LET PEOPLE DOWN, TOO*—you’ll let them down because you, too, are human and as frustrating as that is, *this is what we do to one another.* That’s one reason to *forgive* others; here’s another...

Let’s turn to Ephesians (4:32, NLT): “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *just as God through Christ has forgiven you* [italics mine].” Being a Christian means we understand Jesus came to Earth to take all our sins to the cross and, in turn, offer us forgiveness. So, what do you have to do to earn God’s forgiveness? Nothing. It’s free. All you have to do is accept it. ‘And your neighbor? What do they have to do to earn *your* forgiveness? NOTHING is the correct answer. Why? Because we’re to forgive one another ... just as God through Christ forgave us! *That’s the way it works for Christians...*

And that, folks, is truly loving your neighbor—offering them MERCY, just as we’ve been offered by Christ! So, when you ... *encourage* someone who’s hurting ... *direct* someone who’s lost ... *give* to someone who’s in need, and ... *forgive* someone who’s let you down, that’s *loving your neighbor as yourself!* I warned you up earlier, but here’s my challenge to you this week: If you want to be GREAT in the eyes of God ... OPEN

YOUR EYES this week. Slow down just a little bit. And choose to *love your neighbor as yourself*. And know this as you commit to this challenge: *God* is pulling for you; *God* is cheering for you; and *God's* going to put people in your path this week, just like he did for those participants in the Princeton study. So, what are *you* going to do? Let's step up and love our neighbor, shall we? Let's DARE TO CARE... **LET US PRAY.**