

# Giving

**"Foundations of the New Normal" | August 1-2, 2020**

**Leviticus 19:9-18; John 13:34-35**

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## WE ARE MADE TO CONNECT.

**Ironically, you may not be feeling very connected at the moment.**

You may feel isolated.

You may want to connect with people.

However, the new normal has done a lot to strain our connections with each other.

The new normal has pulled us away from people physically at times, and made us feel unsafe around each other.

The new normal has also surfaced a ton of needs and opinions that we all have, while at the same time making us less patient with everyone else's needs and opinions!

The new normal has left us feeling very disconnected!

**However, our connections help to define us. Animals are known by the company they keep.**

Did you know that a group of bats is actually known as a *cauldron*? (Doesn't that name draw a picture?)

Or perhaps that a group of elephants is called a *parade*?

When flamingos get together, it isn't a flock. It's a *flamboyance*!

A gathering of rhinos is known as a *crash*, which sounds about right!

And then there is the slightly more familiar term for a group of whales, which is a *pod*.

Frequently, animals are known by the company that they keep.

**The Old Testament flatly states that we humans are made for connection with one another.**

Shortly after the LORD made the first man, He put the man in a garden in Eden that he created for the man.

Though the man had work to do, the LORD said bluntly in Genesis 2:18: *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*

The LORD brought all of the creatures with which He had populated the world before the man. The man named them all but didn't find a suitable partner in any of them.

Therefore, the LORD created the woman from the rib of the man.

On the most fundamental levels possible, we are made for each other.

**When we know who we are, we can act, rather than react.**

I've said that before during this series, but what does that really mean?

The new normal presents us with a novel set of challenges, and challenges prompt us to react.

However, when we react, we frequently do so out of our sinful nature and make mistakes. Plus, circumstances take control of the agenda for our lives.

But when we know who we are, we have the opportunity to act, rather than react. We set our own agenda, and our convictions determine what we do, instead of our sin nature.

Today, as we think about who we are, we start with the fact that God made us to connect.

But let's take that concept one step further. As we seek to understand our identity and use it as the foundation for how we are to think about ourselves and how we are to act in the new normal, we need to realize something additional about those of us who are Christians:

## FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ARE BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

**Since followers of Jesus are all children of the same Heavenly Father, we are brothers and sisters.**

The New Testament speaks of us repeatedly as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our familial relationship is rarely explained; rather, it's taken for granted!

In John 1:12-13 from last week, John told us that we followers of Jesus have been born again and are now brothers and sisters to each other: *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

In Matthew 12:46-50, Jesus makes the implications of this new relationship clear: *While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

If we all have the same Heavenly Father and if Jesus is our brother, then that makes us family to each other. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

**The New Testament explicitly tells us that we belong to one another.**

In 1991, theologian and church-growth expert Carl George catalogued the instances of the phrase "one another" in the original Greek of the New Testament.

He came up with 59 occurrences of the phrase "one another" being applied to followers of Jesus.

Sixteen times it's associated with commands to **Love One Another**. As in 1 Thessalonians 3:12, which says: *And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you.*

On 11 different occasions, the New Testament calls us to **Stand with One Another**—even when it is difficult and even when it is uncomfortable. This is an attitude of the heart. Take, for instance, Romans 12:16, which includes these words: *Live in harmony with one another.*

Ten times the New Testament tells us to **Serve One Another** as in 1 Peter 4:10, *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*

Another 10 times the New Testament tells us to serve one another by commanding us to **Encourage One Another** and build each other up. Take Hebrews 10:24 as an example: *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.*

There are other commands, but I think you see the point. The New Testament is very concerned with the way we brothers and sisters in Christ treat each other.

**In fact, the New Testament is more concerned with the outworking of this relationship than it is with its theological grounding.**

The New Testament spends very little time telling us how we became brothers and sisters.

Instead, the New Testament focuses on the implications of the fact that we're family.

Now that we're brothers and sisters, how do we treat one another?

This week, I want to focus on one word that really characterizes how we treat one another. That word is "give." Why? Because this word guides us as we think about the new normal. As brothers and sisters, we give to each other. So let's look at three biblical principles on how we are to give to one another:

## GIVE PEOPLE WHAT THEY TRULY NEED.

### **I had a difficult time giving my wife what she truly needed when she asked me for a stand mixer.**

As a young man, I heard one story after another about insensitive men who gave the women in their lives gifts they didn't want; gifts that humiliated them.

I heard stories of husbands giving their wives vacuum cleaners for Christmas, only to be surprised when their wives became angry.

So when my wife, Tammi, asked me for a stand mixer for a gift, I felt paralyzed.

She wanted the stand mixer, and I could think of plenty of reasons that a stand mixer would be a great gift.

First, she loves cooking, and the stand mixer would help her do something she loves.

Plus, it was more than we would spend on a kitchen gadget -- unless it was a gift.

But if I gave my wife an appliance for a gift, would I end up in the penalty box?

In the end, I bought the stand mixer, and it made Tammi very happy. Why? Because it was what she truly needed and truly wanted.

The Old Testament is incredibly practical in how it tells us to treat one another.

### **The Book of Leviticus contains many of the specific commands for how we are to live out God's Law.**

The commands of Leviticus were given from Mount Sinai.

Moses had begun to receive the Law, and the Israelites had completed building the Tabernacle, a tent where God met with His people.

God's glory came to dwell in the Tabernacle, but God is holy, and nothing unholy could go into his presence, even Moses. So Moses remained outside the Tabernacle as God spoke.

Then God gave Moses commandments about how His people could live holy lives.

Some of these commands have to do with how we treat one another. One section of commands is found in Leviticus, chapter 19, verses 9-18.

### **Leviticus 19:9-10 commands us to give *Provision for the Poor*.**

*"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God."*

This command addresses reaping (which applies to grain) and the vineyards (which applies to grapes). But the implication is that when we farm, we are to leave a little behind for the poor to pick up.

This command applies to the poor of the land and to immigrants as well.

The point is to make sure that the poor have enough to eat. That's a command.

**Then Leviticus 19:11-12 commands us to give *Honesty in Transactions*.**

*"You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."*

Obviously, we are not to steal (which is to take things by stealth from others).

But then we are to avoid all kinds of falsehood and lies in our dealings with one another.

Specifically, God says that we are to avoid using His name and swearing by Him in order to cover up our lies.

We must be honest with each other and not drag God into our dishonesty.

**Leviticus 19:13-14 commands us to give *Dignity to All*.**

*"You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD."*

When verse 13 talks about robbing someone, it seems that this command is against taking something from someone by force (as opposed to stealing it by stealth).

Beyond that, we are to make sure that the workers in our care get fair wages at a fair time. The people of the Old Testament were frequently living day to day, so withholding their wages for days or weeks would make it impossible for them to provide for their families. So we give wages on time.

Then the LORD had to tell the people of Moses' day that they should not do unkind things to people because of their exceptionalities.

They shouldn't say things around deaf people who can't hear.

And they shouldn't trip blind people intentionally for their own amusement.

Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity.

**Leviticus 19:15-16 commands us to give *Justice in the System*.**

*"You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD."*

We are to do nothing unjust in court.

We don't take the side of the wealthy and powerful. Nor do we show favoritism to the poor.

We also avoid spreading lies and rumors about others, misleading the court of public opinion.

This section on justice in the system closes with an odd phrase, "... you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor..." It seems to mean that we don't do anything to endanger another person's life, either intentionally, by neglect, or by just passively letting something happen.

To be holy, we must give justice in the system.

**Leviticus 19:17-18 commands us to give *Security from Wrath*.**

*"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."*

We can't harbor hatred for one another and still be holy. That's what the Bible says.

Instead, we are to use our words kindly and reasonably to solve our problems.

And if words don't work, we don't take revenge or bear grudges.

We give people security knowing that they will not face our wrath.

### **And why are we to do each one of these things?**

As we see in verse 18, it's because we are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to do for our neighbors the things that we would love to have done for us.

This is the famous summary of the Old Testament laws governing how we are to treat one another. It becomes an overarching principle that explains and organizes half of the Old Testament law. In fact, you could think of it this way: "If you don't know what to do, then love your neighbor by treating your neighbor as yourself."

This is very practical teaching. And it sets a precedent for how we are to give to each other. We are to give each other exactly what we really, really need.

Jesus picks up this theme in the New Testament. When asked how He would summarize the Old Testament Law, Jesus quoted verse 18 along with the command to Love the Lord your God with everything you have.

And giving our neighbors what they truly need is the prelude for how we are to treat our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we are to give our neighbors everything they need, then we are going to go even further for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And underpinning it all is the authority of God. Each of these sections ends with the same refrain, "I am the LORD." Why are we to give each other everything that we need? Because the LORD said so. That's how He made us, and that is the start of how He expects us to treat one another.

## **GIVE EVEN WHEN IT COSTS.**

### **On the night before he was betrayed, Jesus focused on His followers.**

It was the Passover season.

On the night before he was betrayed, Jesus gathered with his disciples in an upper room for one last meal.

They had been traveling the dirty roads all day long, so when they came together for the evening meal, their feet were filthy.

No one was willing to do the humiliating work of washing everyone's feet before dinner.

### **However, Jesus demonstrated that godly love is practical.**

John 13 says that Jesus took off His clothes and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin, and washed and dried their feet.

Jesus drew out the point immediately that he was modeling for them. He told His followers, "Look at what I've done for you! Now, if I (your Teacher) would do that for you, then shouldn't you do the same thing for one another?"

In some ways, Jesus' entire experience beginning later that evening was another example of how practical godly love is! He submitted to being arrested, humiliated, beaten, and crucified -- all for us, all demonstrating what it means to love and give, even when it costs.

### **Then in John 13:34-35, he turned what he had done into a command:**

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

**Jesus called this a new command.**

In the Old Testament, the focus was on loving all of our neighbors.

Jesus affirmed that command and asked us to think very broadly about how we ourselves can proactively look for ways and opportunities to be good neighbors.

Jesus also supplemented the practicality of the command to love our neighbors with the command to make disciples of all nations. That's radical, broad neighbor love!

Here, Jesus focuses in on us — the Church, His followers — and on how we treat one another.

### **What does it look like today to “Give even when it costs?”**

Giving even when it costs looks a lot like the way Jesus served his disciples.

And that decision is made more difficult by the fact that we are in this new normal.

In order to give when it costs, we have to think creatively. If you're medically vulnerable in some way, to make the decision to serve means getting creative about how you can give to people without being near them physically. You can give financially. You can give by praying diligently. You can give by making phone calls and video calls to keep people connected.

In order to give when it costs, we have to push past our fear. If you're medically safe, then you definitely have more ways to serve. You have the ability to do practical things to help people out. But that means pushing past the fear that makes us want to take care of ourselves right now and just survive. How can we find ways to roll up our sleeves and give time to make someone else's life better right now?

In order to give when it costs, we have to set aside our wounded pride. These days make us suspicious of one another. We judge each other. We are easily offended and frustrated, and sometimes we have to push past our wounded pride to serve people.

But that's what it looks like to give even when it costs. We think creatively, we push past our fear, and we set aside our wounded pride.

## **GIVE BECAUSE WE MUST.**

### **Seventeenth-century author John Donne reminds us that we aren't complete without each other:**

In 1624, London had been impacted by a mysterious disease that spread throughout the city.

Donne himself had gotten profoundly sick.

In a prose meditation on those days that reads almost like poetry, Donne reminded us that we are connected to one another so profoundly that we can't do without each other.

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

- John Donne, Meditation XVII from “Devotions upon Emergent Occasions” (1624)

What hurts one of us hurts us all. What one of us loses, we all lose. That's what Donne was saying. And he was sounding a powerfully biblical note and giving us a critical reminder!

### **We need each other.**

No man is an island.

It's not good for us to be alone.

We were created to connect.

We are brothers and sisters in Christ who need each other if we are going to follow Jesus well. You need me. And I need you.

**We need each other in the new normal more than ever.**

We're isolated and frankly a little bit traumatized.

We need God desperately right now.

And God created us such that we bring God and healing and encouragement to one another.

So these are days to push past anything that keeps us from giving in safe ways to each other.

And these are days to push past whatever keeps us from receiving safely from each other.

We need each other in the new normal more than ever.

**We need each other if we are going to show Jesus to the world.**

Jesus said in John 13:35 that when we love each other well, people recognize us as His disciples. Those words resound powerfully, and I hope you are paying attention to them.

When we love each other — when we give to each other — we show the world what a Christian looks like, we show the world that we are Christians, and we show the world that Jesus is alive and at work.

The flip side of that statement is true, as well: When we fail to love each other, we lead the world to conclude that faith in Jesus isn't worth very much.

But that means we know what we must do. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We must love one another and give to one another practically and selflessly, no matter what. That's how we live in the new normal.