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Heavenly Father, thank you that you are always there for us. That you are faithful. That there is no reason for us to ever question or doubt your love for us. It is so much bigger than anything we can ever bow or understand or believe. We thank you that we can just rest. That we are not because of who we are or what we've done to earn that love. Because you are faithful and good and you just show us we give us that love. And you can be trusted. Please help us to hear what it is you're saying to us today. Pray to Jesus. Amen. Last week I spoke on the glory of God. The Bible makes the claim that God is ultimate. He is supreme, most wonderful, most awesome, most loving, most gracious being in the opposite sense. The Bible also makes the claim that God created us and that He did something glorified Himself. And that He demonstrated His ultimateness. Even after we prevailed against Him and the death penalty for ourselves, He chose to show us the greatest love by stepping in and paying the penalty for our sin. He did this not because we had anything to offer Him, not because we were worthy or good or really, really sorry, but because He is ultimate in love and He wanted to demonstrate to all creation for all time His glory. And so I brought us to the conclusion that if God is so ultimate and so glorious, and that because He created us to glorify Him and paid such a great price to restore us to Himself, that we must, in response to such a great love, commit our lives to glorifying Him in everything we think, say, and do. And that was rooted in 1 Corinthians 10.31, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all to the glory of God. Today I'm going to speak on the most practical way we can glorify God. It's very obvious, although it's not always easy. The most practical way we can glorify God is to live for Him, specifically to replace our interests with His. And because He has given us instructions on how to live, we can easily evaluate how well we are living for Him by seeing how our lives line up with His commands. Of course, there were lots of commands in the Bible, but Jesus summed them all up like this. Mark 12, 30 and 31. "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself." Most of us know this verse, and most of us can paraphrase it, even if we don't remember where to find it in the Bible. And I would say most of us do a pretty good job of trying to live this one out. We volunteer, we donate, we give, we serve, we don't steal or kill or destroy. We have a pretty good grip on the concept of "do good and don't be bad to other people." But there's another command that Jesus gives us that goes hand in hand with this one. And I'll be the first to confess that I don't follow it nearly as well. I've come up with lots of excuses as to why it doesn't apply to me, or why I don't need to worry about it in this or that situation. But the same person who commanded me to love also commanded this. Matthew 28, 18-20. That one makes me uncomfortable. Make disciples. Can't we just do the love stuff? People really like the love stuff. But here's the problem. Number one, it's a command. Jesus starts off that verse by saying, "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me." If I claim to be a Christian, then I'm claiming to be submitted to the authority of Christ. Jesus says, "I have all authority. Are you under my authority?" Then go make disciples. Not after you finish seminary. Not when you're older and wiser. Not after you've tried things your way for a while and now you're looking for a change. Not unless that sounds like too much. And not any of the other excuses we use to get out of doing this command. He means us and he means now. No excuses. Another problem we have when trying to get out of this command is that by failing to obey this command, we also fail to obey the commands we just talked about a moment ago. We are not loving God if we're disobeying Him. And we're not loving our neighbor if we're not concerned for His salvation and discipleship. So to disobey this is to disobey all of it. If you're like me, you're probably tuning out right now, listening to the little radio station in your head called the Excuse Channel. But I'm coming to the realization that the more I want to love God and grow in my maturity, the more I need to deal with these issues on the back burner. And to God this is a big one. I can't say I love God if I'm not caring about what He cares about. So let's get practical. I have some slides. This is unusual for me. They're not very good, but you'll see. There we go. This one represents you in the center with all the other people in the world around you. Now those people can be divided up a couple of different ways. On the next slide, we see that everyone can be divided up into the categories of saved and unsaved. Or, as on the next slide shows us, they can be divided up people in my life and people not in my life. So we combine these on the next slide and we can see everyone in one of four groups. Christians in my life, Christians not in my life, unsaved in my life, unsaved not in my life. And as we study the Bible, we find instructions on how we are to love and behave towards each one of these four groups. I was going to talk about all of these groups today, but when I practiced it, I ran way too long. So we're just going to talk about two of those groups today and save the others for next week. The two that we're discussing today are the two groups of people in our lives. Jesus tells us to go make disciples of all nations, and often we hear that and we think of other nations. But all nations includes our nation, so it's appropriate to discuss how we can fulfill this command with the people around us. Our next slide deals with the Christians in our life. How are we to treat them? 1 Corinthians 14 tells us that we are to edify one another with our gifts. Verse 12 says, "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." Verse 26 says, "How is it then, brethren, whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm or a teaching or a tongue or a revelation or interpretation, let all things be done for edification." Hebrews 3.13 says, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Acts 2.42 says, "Talking about the early Christians, the disciples, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayers." In Colossians 3.16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with gracing your hearts to the Lord." These verses demonstrate that part of the process of making disciples of all nations is to use your gifts to care for, encourage, and train up the other folks in this church. We should be discipling the people around us until they are mature enough to make disciples of their own. If right now you're thinking, "Well, I do X for these people, so I've got that checked off," I want to remind you that we are not doing this to check off boxes. We are doing this because these are our brothers and sisters and God loves them, and we are to love them and serve them out of our heart of love. If your attitude is that you're just meeting your obligation, then I challenge you to examine your heart because it sounds ill. This is more than obligation, this is family, and these are God's children. Our next slide deals with the unsaved people in our lives. This is the one most people have trouble with because this country is so saturated with Christianity, it's highly unlikely to find someone who has never heard of Jesus. Most people have made up their mind about Christianity in America, and so we think, "What can I say? They've made their decision." Here's what the Bible says. 2 Peter 3.9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This is a great verse. First, it teaches us that the reason that we're still here and not whisked off to heaven yet is because God is patiently waiting for as many people as possible to be saved. Secondly, it tells us that God's will is that none should perish. Let me make this clear. Hell is real, it's very bad, it's eternal, and so many people are headed there right now, even people in our lives. God doesn't want anyone to go there, but people are guilty, and God is perfect. And someone who is perfect does not let guilty people sneak in with the innocent. Sneaking people into heaven is not good, or holy, or righteous, and so God cannot do that. Hell is the place for people who have refused Jesus. We don't want anyone to refuse Jesus. If you love God, you must love the people He loves. First John 2.9 says, "He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now." John is questioning the salvation of anyone who does not love his brother. So let us agree that God wants everyone saved, and so should we. So how do we go about that? Great question, and one that I have struggled with a lot. To me, it seems like Christianity is a logical choice, so my inclination is to put together a Bible study, invite my unsafe friends over, explain to them how it is, they get saved, happy ending. But it doesn't work like that. There are barriers to people believing. The average, unsafe person in my life is not comfortable with coming to a Bible study. That's a barrier for him. By the way, to not tell him that's a Bible study and to trick him into coming is a terrible idea. Don't do that. To overcome these barriers that keep people from the gospel. Sometimes all we can do is show love. Drench them with love and do it in the name of Christ, representing Christ, but don't think it has to always be Bible study in prayer time. It can just be love and mercy. There's a lot of great books on the subject of evangelism and small groups, and I certainly don't have time to discuss all the potential strategies, but I hope you start thinking about it and asking questions and brainstorming. Think about every person in your life and ask, "How can I crank up my love towards them another notch?" Maybe you need to serve them more. Maybe you serve them plenty, and now you need to start finding ways to bring God into the conversation. Maybe we as a body need to just get out into the community and wear caramel friends t-shirts and just clean a park or hand out water to marathon runners or whatever. Show that we care about people and that we are willing to go where they are and be a part of their lives. Some of those people will be curious as to what these Christians who actually practice what they preach, and they'll seek to learn more about us, and then we can invite them to something else, the non-confrontational and so on, until they become a believer. Matthew 5, 16 says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Now there's a voice in my brain that says, "Hey, you're being dishonest with these people. All your niceness towards them is phony because you just want to get them in your church." You know what I'm talking about. This isn't the case. The love that I show these people is genuine, and it is rooted in the love that God showed me and the love that He's given me towards these people. If you truly become convinced that people are headed to hell without Christ, then doing anything you can to convince them to come to Christ is the most loving way to treat them. There's nothing dishonest about it. If someone asks why we're doing what we're doing, you say, "God loves me and God loves you, and He wants me to demonstrate His love for you through this." That's what we believe. Finally, I need to give you a warning here. If you say to yourself, "I need to start doing kingdom work because that's what God's commanded," you're going to burn yourself out quickly, or you might not even get started. What I'm calling us to should come out of our heart towards Him. Never forget, step one is fall in love with God. How do you fall in love with God? The same way you fall in love with anyone else. Spend time with Him. Learn about Him. Observe Him. Consider all the wonderful things He's done for you. This is why Bible and prayer are so important for a Christian. It is what God will use to transform you into the person He wants you to be. Any change you make to your life that is not birthed in the love of God is just religion, and it will be temporary and it will leave you weak and burnt out. When Jesus spoke those famous verses about the greatest commandments, He was speaking to a scribe. Listen to what happened right after those verses. Continuing in Mark 12, "So the scribe said to him, 'Well said, teacher, you have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the soul and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' And when Jesus saw that He answered wisely, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' What did this scribe say that put Him not far from the kingdom of God? That to love God is more important than any service to God without love. Or as 1 Corinthians 13 says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and all understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burnt, but have not love, it profits me nothing." When you fall in love with God, which is the natural response to being showed such great love, then it will be easy to love that which He loves and to desire that which He desires. Many of you have fallen in love, and after you did, you began to fall in love with the things that that person loves. It's the same with God. But if we try and perform these works out of duty or obligation, it will not only drain us, but it won't even be acceptable to God. Twice in the book of Matthew, Jesus quotes Hosea 6, which says, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Simply put, God wants our hearts, not just our hands. So fall in love with God, and use that to empower you. Don't wait until it all feels right. Start thinking today about how you could be influencing every person in your life for God, whether it is building up your brothers and sisters in Christ right here in this building, or whether it's sharing love in the name of God with the unsaved people in your life. Also, start praying about identifying and using your spiritual gifts. We all know about prophecy, tongues, and healing, but there's also service, mercy, leadership, hospitality, faith, discernment, wisdom, giving, and more. All of these are gifts from God that are to be used and build up and edify these people here. So pray about what your gifts are, and then pray about how to use them. Be clever and creative. Grow your heart for these people and see what areas it leads you to give and serve. I also encourage you to go out there into our culture and start meeting people where they're at. Stop waiting for them to show up here before you take an interest in them. Go to the Lofel Coffee House and look at the bulletin board of events going on, and just start meeting people. Hang out with people and make new friends. You can't let your light so shine before men if you're not before men. So get out there, and as you go, start brainstorming ways to get involved with those people. Look for ways to serve and bless them. Doesn't that just feel like the natural way to love people? Doesn't that just sound right? It's in your nature because you were created in the image of God, and that's His nature, relational love. God loves the people of this world. He is excited and passionate about showing His love to them. We are so blessed that He has invited us to be a part of His mission. Let's not pass it up. Let's get excited about what God is inviting us to and start brainstorming new ways to show God's love to the people around us. Let's continue to love, but let's be intentional about that love, saving souls, and making disciples. Amen? All right. Heavenly Father, we praise You and we thank You that You have chosen us to be Your servants and vessels and ambassadors of love to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to the other people in our community and in our lives. We thank You for the opportunity to love You and glorify You in this way. Please give us creativity and inspiration to show us new ways and new opportunities to do this all for You for Your glory. Fill us and remind us with Your love, God, so that we have the power and energy to make this change, to be Your ambassadors to the world. In Jesus' name, amen.