

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop
Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The **bold** and underline offer the scribe's emphasis and the [brackets] refer to other Willard teachings.



"Love Your Neighbor"

[49:35]

[Also see Willard, "The Neighborhood Initiative"]

START - [Start 2:20]

I do appreciate a short introduction. I'm trying to start a movement to introduce speakers by listing their infirmities but probably the introductions will be too long.

Paul - *"I glory in my infirmities"*

Grace is not a consolation prize, it is the first prize.

I appreciate the sense of movement. It comes out of, however good of what we have been doing, it's kind of run out of gas. So you find people searching, and that is good. If you search for the Lord, you can be sure you will find him. He will see to it that we will find him.

I want to speak very simply and practically, the command,
To love your neighbor as yourself.

In find that people generally are wiped out by the command to love their neighbor as themselves. They don't know what to do with it. It is partly due to the fact that in our world, there are so many people.

I find that a lot of people have trouble identifying their neighbors. And yet, if that isn't done, where do you go with the teaching of love your neighbor as yourself? I want to try to work through that in basic terms.

We need to understand of how we approach this issue.

We have an example - The Neighborhood Initiative
<https://neighborhoodinitiative.com/>

Leviticus 19:18, *"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge towards the sons of your people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."*

Loving your neighbor is founded in "I am the Lord."

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop
Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

Mark 12 & Luke 10 - "Love the Lord your God with your all...and your neighbor as yourself" go together.

The illusion in our world that we can carry on the ethics of Jesus without the theology and the life that ties in to God that makes it possible not just to justice and hate them all equally. the equal and love them. We live in a world that is sick with justice without love. You have to go to love before you can go to justice. Justice will never do justice to justice. Love does not substitute for justice, it makes justice what it's supposed to be.

Leviticus 19:34, "The stranger as the native among you and you shall love him as yourself." The stranger is also the neighbor. How that works we'll have to talk about. This is a verse that is one of the most improbable things that shows up in scripture. The idea that your relationship to people included people who were not like you, who were not the same general culture, body, money, whatever. Under God, you are to love them as yourself. That's a part of our neighbor. God has in history increasingly forced people who are unlike together because it is his intention to pull every kind of people together in one in the unity of love that is a social structure in love.

When Jesus came, He left them with the command to go to all nations - all gentiles, kinds of people. The fundamental passage is to break down barriers not just between Jew and Gentile. How to love across all boundaries - no Jew, Greek...male, female. Why? Because they are all persons, they are spiritual beings inserted into a world in a particular place. The reason we love people is not for diversity but for sameness. Diversity is a secular war cry as though there is something good about diversity. The problem is to get beyond diversity to what is the same.

"You were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

* The phrase the "Good Samaritan" is not in the text because for those people there is not such thing as a 'good" Samaritan.

I want to move on to key ideas.

1.) What is Love?

[13:40]

This is a barrier because they don't know what love is. The intention to do good. That's how we love our neighbor - we seek what is good for them. We seek what is good for them as we seek what is good for ourselves. If you don't seek what is good for yourself, you won't seek what is good for your

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

neighbor. Everything needs to be brought under God to understand you are your closest neighbor. You need to take care of what is good for you. That is not selfish. Selfish is where you want what you want. Under God and walking with Christ you've come to understand that what you want is your main problem. The person who does not understand that your desires are not your friend, winds up in the situation where we are today with money - people doing what they desire not what is good for them. Love seeks for what is good for what is loved, not what is desired.

Young people don't understand what is love, they think it is desire.
Desires are not your friend. Young people think "love" is "desire".
* Love Chocolate cake. You don't love it. You want to eat it.

First Step - Be a Person of Compassion

[17:15]

Love your neighbor as yourself is to have compassion for your neighbor. Love your neighbor is not special acts, it is an attitude towards people. There where growing in Christlikeness is what is inside us. A person of compassion is someone who has become able to love people. Deciding to become a person of compassion is crucial to thinking about loving your neighbor.

One of the important things about the Samaritan is he had compassion. The other two did not have compassion. Their problem was not that they were busy, they were not compassionate people. The Samaritan was compassionate. He felt for people. You have to be willing to do that. It is very threatening. It can overwhelm you if you don't have resources to work from. That's where you have to go back to God to live as a compassionate person. Living as a compassionate person is the main thing we have to think about if when we are trying to think about loving our neighbor as ourself.

Ephesians 3:13-19 - *"13 Therefore I ask you not to become discouraged about my tribulations in your behalf, since they are your glory. 14 For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God."*

You're reaching for compassion and God fills us because we are able to love because we have been loved. The foundation is our character as compassionate people. Many people will back away because that is very

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop
Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

threatening. You have to have a firm hold on the adequacy of God in order to feel what others feel. If not, you'll back away. If you don't feel that, you won't be compassionate and you won't love your neighbor a yourself.

2nd Step - You have to decide who will be your neighbors. [22:00]

There is a lot of confusion from the old way thinking "neighbors" are the people who live next door. Sometimes they may be your neighbor. The neighbors is who you have intimate involvement. My closest neighbor is my wife. The healing has to start there. Spouse, work, staff, fellowship. You are going to have to decide to whom you are going to be a neighbor.

"Who is my neighbor?" He thought he was off the hook.

Jesus turned it around and said, "Who was a neighbor to the man in need?"

Our question - to whom will I be a neighbor? Your neighbors are going to be the ones that you pay special attention to. Who my neighbor is depends largely upon me. Who my neighbor is in large part depends upon me.

I want to be clear here. We need to try to love the people who live next door. But in our world, that is often a futile effort. They often don't want to be known. We should be prayerful and thoughtful of how we can love our neighbors. We think in terms of people we are in contact with. Prayerfully say, "Am I to be a neighbor to this person?"

That's what enables us to makes sense of the commandment. Every individual needs to know how to do what Jesus said.

Review.

- 1.) Become a compassionate person.
- 2.) You have to decide who you are going to be a neighbor to.

Don't start with a lot of people. One of the things that defeats the cause is people take on too much. Try to be a neighbor to one person for a few weeks really investing in their life as you live with them. You listen to them, you get to know their circumstances, what's going on in their insides, you pray specifically and begin to see the hand of God move in their life.

The greatest thing you can do for your neighbor is to give them assured knowledge of God working in their life. What they really need is to know God. Witnessing has been debauched. It is to bring someone to know. It is not "soul winning". It only occurs once in the Bible in Proverbs.

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop
Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

A witness brings people to know.

* "wit" in witness refers to knowledge.

That's the greatest thing for your neighbor. They need to know that, not just be talked into something. If you talk people into doing things, you've got a full time job for the rest of their life.

Bring people to now the reality of God in their lives. What I am saying is think small - one, two, three persons. Sometimes we lose our family because we did not love them as our neighbor. They didn't come to know and they drift away because they did not know the reality of God.

3rd - List the people with whom you are intimately engaged. [30:50]

It should be a pretty small number. Prayer and thoughtfulness. Who are the people I can be a neighbor with? Don't be over ambitious. Do a few. Let it grow. To be a neighbor can be a significant undertaking. You have to take people on like the Good Samaritan did. Being a neighbor means really investing in people. To listen to them, get to know them, hear their burdens, help them to find what they need. It is what God did in his love for us.

I would suggest don't start with AIDS in Africa. For most people are apt to get trapped in sentimental abstractions. People at a distance are much nicer than those who are right up against us.

4th - Devote serious, attention and prayer to 2-3 people. [33:20]

Allow time for this to develop. It may take a few months until it become a grace-sustained habit. Then you can bring more people into that circle. What is I am describing should be exactly what we do in our churches.

"Mark of a disciple is how we love one another."

We probably have to go back and re-work that. We've cut that down so that doesn't mean a whole lot. How do we work that in our groups? The church is a witness of what life is supposed to be like. The church should be a hospital in all sorts of stages, a place where people live in healing love under the power of God. We may need to think what what we do in churches to allow that to happen. We have certain forms of services that may not be conducive to love our neighbor. That is challenging and one can go wrong in trying to do something about it.

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop
Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

I like to say, "Don't announce the revolution." Just teach and let it grow and help people who are ready to move and allow them to enter more and more into the kinds of relations that Jesus is talking about.

The Church — [35:55] You know, there is not hope for the world apart from the church. You are the ones. It is the pastors who must lead. They are the ones that have the content, they have the position, and they have the power. No one else does.

Education is progressively coming to understand this but they don't know what to do about it. People talk about the wonderful things that are taught at Harvard or some place. What they teach at Harvard is responsible for the mess we are in. They are well meaning people. They are doing their best they can in many cases. But, they don't have the content and the content is the kingdom of God is right here. It is at hand and you can enter into it by becoming a disciple of Jesus. And if you do that, you have the wherewithal to take care of all the problems of life. That is what is required to enable us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Loving our neighbor as ourselves is what what comes as we learn how to live richly from the Kingdom of God.

5th - Necessary to Practice disciplines of spiritual life [37:25]

In order to receive the compassion, grace and love for the growth required to live a life of neighbor love. You'll never feel adequate. The needs are too great. You come to the end of the day and see it is too much. You're not supposed to do it. A community is supposed to emerge. That's what our churches can be where people grow together to address their world with the good news of the adequacy of God to every human soul to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. That's something we do. It is not poured on our head one day as we walk out of church. We do that.

We have to think how can love God with my all...heart, mind, strength, soul
Doctor Jesus has laid it all out. We need to follow His instructions.

One of the greatest disciplines is coming together with people in worship, in love, and in service to others. The church is the natural unity of community. You can't get community as it is meant without the church. We come together as failures. If we are to be redeemed and reach out, it must be these little groups that God has appointed as human beings coming together in love that grow in power and wisdom so they can be the teacher's of the nations.

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop
Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

That's why you and I are appointed to do. Jesus said to make disciples, submerge them in the Trinitarian reality and teach them to do all the things that he said. I want to ask you, do you think that would make a difference? It would address the problems of individuals and groups that are unsolvable apart from what the redeemed people of Jesus Christ have to bring to their world. Nothing else will do it. We've had a lot of time to try different things and nothing else works. The redemption that comes to the people who are living as disciples of Jesus together in their communities.

What does this require?

[41:15]

Basically it requires the intention to do it. This can be discouraging because as you look around, you are apt to think, "What are we intending to do?" That is the beginning of discovery. What do we give most of our mental intention in church?

Is it forming communities of love that are so astonishing that people can not miss the message that Jesus brings the Trinitarian presence of God among human beings?

That what the intention has always been the intention that God should dwell in is people. That's going to happen, one way or another. That's His attention and He will make it come to pass.

Our question is, is it our intention to bring that to pass in our own lives individually with our neighbors and in our fellowships?

~ ~ ~ **End of Teaching @ 42:45** ~ ~ ~

"Love Your Neighbor" Workshop
Dallas Willard to Pastors, 2012

~ ~ ~ Q & A

Q - You spoke of justice without love. We want to serve our neighbor but we don't bring the gospel?

A - [42:49] - Young people are embarrassed by the gospel they've heard but they are not embarrassed to serve the poor. The problem is that "justice" is not the gospel. The proclamation that we live in a universe that is presided over by a being whose love is so great it is incomprehensible.

What is often called the "bringing of the gospel" is that the gospel gets lost. That means there's no real hope beyond human efforts.

The real issue is "What is our message? What are we preaching?"

The good news is - *"You're off the hook and you get to go to Heaven when you die."* Not much is said about if you like it when you get there. If you don't like God, you won't like heaven.

Q - [45:15] Social gospel of "justice" - the only

A - [46:45] Without me you can do nothing, you will realize if you do nothing, it will be without Him.

They don't understand that grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude.

I Co 15, *"I have accomplished more than any of them, not I but the grace of Christ in me."*

We need to teach people how to be a part of the flowing of grace in the Kingdom of God. We don't do a lot of that in our churches.

Find the ones in the congregation ready to go and work with them. Minister to others, love them, teach them but work with the ones ready to go. Especially the ones out in the public. The public square comes to our church every day.

The church is for discipleship. Discipleship is for the world.

How to live their ordinary life in the Kingdom of God, and that transforms the world, and nothing else does.

~ ~ ~ End of Video @ 49:35 ~ ~ ~

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