

Double-Love Standard

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Matthew 22:34-40

Sermons Series:
Best Spiritual
Practices

*What does
God expect of
me?*

What does God expect of you? What does God expect of me? I love this question to get us started today. It's not original. This question is Rick Stearns's, from his book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*. Rick Stearns is the President of World Vision—a VPC Mission Partner. Answering this question, he says, changed his life. What does God expect of us?

Going to church every Sunday, saying grace at mealtime, doing your spiritual practices, avoiding the most serious vices, or sins? Is that enough? Or does God expect more? You and I claim to follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God. If that's true, then all that Jesus said and all that Jesus did must impact how you and I live our lives (Stearns, p.1). Is that enough? Or does God expect more? More than church attendance? More than prayer? More than belief? Even more than self-denial? YES, God asks for everything. Yes, God does expect more. Stearns writes, "Jesus the Christ expects a total life commitment." In fact, the Gospel "calls us to be Jesus' partners in changing the world."

The Hole in Our Gospel is the belief that being a follower of Christ "...requires much more than just having a personal and transforming relationship with God (good and necessary). But being a disciple also requires having a public and transforming relationship with the world." Stearns puts it this way: "If your personal faith in Christ has no positive outward expression (in word or in deed), then your faith – and mine – has a HOLE in it" (p.2).

There are no holes in Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees this morning. His Double-Love Standard is clear. Here, a disciple of Jesus is defined by **love in action**, BOTH in our **personal** relationship with God AND in our **public** relationship with our neighbor.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the

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greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

This Double-Love Standard is the APEX, the ultimate of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus cites these two Hebrew verses, which are paramount to His people. He first lifts up the verse from the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:5). It's the most basic, essential creed in all of Judaism. Every worship service begins with the Shema, and every Jewish child memorizes and recites it. Then, second, Jesus lifts up the commandment from Leviticus 19:18. The TWO LOVES intertwined. And it all begins with God loving us first. We have God's DNA of love inside us. In God's perfect design, at our very best, you and I are loveable and we were made to love. To love God and to love others. Wholeheartedly loving God (for loving us first) motivates us to sacrificially loving our neighbor!

What really gets to the Pharisees, in this face-off with Jesus, is that Jesus fuses, unites these two commands together. The phrase "just like it" means the second command is as important as, even equal to the first. Jesus has the audacity to explicitly elevate these two commandments above ALL the rest of the law. Jesus' Double-Love Standard "gives us a *direction to face* and a *way to*

be" (Dale Bruner). That is, we first face God with a wholehearted love, and then we imitate God, by cherishing others! For Jesus, you can't neglect your neighbor while loving God, and you can't neglect God while loving your neighbor.

So, "Who is my neighbor?" As Pastor Stan preached last week on the Good Samaritan, Jesus enlarges the meaning of "neighbor" for us. Mostly, in our comfortable, safe circles we want "neighbor" to be someone who lives within the confines of our cul-de-sacs or streets, just a few houses away. Our "neighbor" is like kin to us, or people like us, living in the same village or community or church. This is true, but God expects more.

Thanks to Jesus; He totally blows this definition up! Who is a "neighbor" on Jesus' terms? Absolutely everyone and anyone – a stranger, an enemy, an acquaintance – anyone you happen to meet, to come across, to bump into. By extension, she/he is anyone you hear about, see on the web-news, or read about in the paper – anyone in here, out there, on the other side of the tracks, on the other side of the globe. Jesus refuses to place a limit on "who is my neighbor." For Jesus, my neighbor includes people who are harassed, abused, and tortured. They are the economically and socially disadvantaged. Jesus' neigh-

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bor? People who will never live in MY neighborhood are my neighbors.

“Only a life lived for others is worth living” (Albert Einstein). Loving God by loving your neighbor means committing to and truly investing in a relationship! It is the giving of yourself, as Jesus gives: giving sacrificially (The Lord’s Supper, as the model). What does God expect of us? “If your personal faith in Christ has no positive outward expression (in word or in deed), then your faith – and mine – has a HOLE in it.”

Have you heard of A.J. Jacobs? A couple of years ago, A.J. Jacobs spent a *Year of Living Biblically*. Literally, he dedicated an entire year, day in and day out, to follow the teachings and instructions of the Bible and to live them as literally as possible. He immersed himself in prayer; he herded sheep in the Israeli desert; he battled his “false gods”; he strived for “extreme honesty” in all situations. He grew a beard that grew so unruly that he was regularly mistaken for a member of the blues rock band, ZZ Top!

Then, A.J. Jacobs wrote a book about his quest. Here is some of how he spent his time loving God and loving his neighbor: He befriended a mentally ill, reclusive neighbor and her dog, living in the apartment next to his. He met a homeless woman on a Metro platform, whom he hugged, kissed and

took care of. Having never been asked in his 38 years, he helped an “old lady” cross the street. For a whole year, he did “garbage detail” at the second-largest soup kitchen in the country (NYC’s Holy Apostles Center).

He took the Bible to heart. But here’s the catch. A.J. Jacobs isn’t even a Christian; he’s not even a practicing Jew. In fact, he was raised in a secular Jewish home, and he considers himself an agnostic! Yet, for a whole year, he was being and doing the Double-Love Standard. Immersed in prayer, telling the truth, resisting idolatry, hugging homeless people, befriending a lonely, depressed neighbor! And he isn’t even Christian. A.J. Jacobs does this? So, what does God expect of me? Of you?

We’re closing our worship this morning with a song called, REACH THE WORLD. The bridge between the chorus goes like this: “Lord, let me be Your hands and feet. Let me be the words that You speak. Let me be Your hands and feet; the words that You speak. Take all of me, Take all of me, to Reach the World.”

It is a real, total commitment to **BOTH** a personal and transforming relationship with God, **AND** a public and transforming relationship with your neighbor. It is getting your head into your heart for God (all of you, mind, soul, and strength). Then, it’s getting your heart into your hands, and your voice, and your

feet for your neighbor – the
lost, the hungry, the thirsty,
broken. ALL of it, loving God
and loving neighbor, together,
in the name of Love, in the
name of Jesus!

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