

Why Do So Many Christians Forget to Fulfill the Second-Greatest Commandment in This Area?

At Medi-Share, we're all about inspiring people to live healthier lives so they can fulfill the plan God has for them. One of the most powerful ways to live a healthier life is to fill it with acts of love and kindness—even when it's hard. Kindness improves heart health, increases energy, increases happiness and pleasure, and lengthens life.

With that in mind, one of our teammates, Rebecca Barrack, inspires us to walk out the biblical imperative to love the unlovable and undeserving.

I've been thinking a lot about these verses lately.

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

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 first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40).

Why is it so easy to love some people and not others? And who is "my neighbor?"

Matthew 5:43-47 goes into further detail for us. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He very explicitly challenges what they have always believed.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your

neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

The word “neighbor” is translated in Hebrew to mean “friend” or “another.” OK, not too difficult. We can love our friends, right?

Jesus then takes it one step further and expanded on the Old Testament definition of “neighbor” to include even one’s enemies.

Whoa, wait a minute. You mean I have to love that person who cut me off in traffic and cursed me out? The boss who let me go as an afterthought? The co-worker who is constantly gunning for the promotion I deserve? That teenager down the street who insists on racing his car through the neighborhood, spinning doughnuts in my front yard? The atheist family at my daughter’s school who protests to remove all mention of religion or God in the classroom?

Yes. All of them, too.

Here’s the thing. If we only love those who love us, as Jesus pointed out, what kind of witness are we? What does it say to the world if we love our families but turn our backs on those who believe differently than we do? What if those people are our families? Then what?

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By

this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

How often do we breeze through this passage without a second thought? Oh yeah, love one another. No problem.

But did you know the word "love" used in this passage comes from the Greek word *agapaō* or *agape*, meaning unconditional love—the love of God for His creation?

Who else has trouble wrapping your head around this? Just me?

It's hard enough, in our sinful flesh, to comprehend just how unconditional God's love for us is. No matter what we do, His love is never out of reach. After all, the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 to find the one that's lost. He loves each and every one of us, unconditionally.

That is the same kind of love we are to have for others—everyone. There are no exclusions.

Most of us are probably familiar with the parable of the good Samaritan in the book of Luke, chapter 10. In it, a lawyer cunningly asks Jesus the original "Who is my neighbor?" question. Jesus answered by telling him a story of a Jewish man who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead on his way to Jericho.

First, a priest passed by and did nothing. Next, a Levite also looked at him and kept walking. Finally, it was a Samaritan who took compassion on the man, bound up his wounds, and brought him into the city for further care. He even went so far as to pay the innkeeper to continue caring for the stranger at his own expense!

"Now which of these three do you think was a neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:36-37).

Samaritans and Jews didn't exactly run in the same circles in that day. So for this man to go out of his way to help his perceived foe went against convention. Simply put, it modeled the love of God.

Go. Do likewise. Be disciples.

"When I was a young kid, I remember my parents went on a weekend getaway to New York," said Medi-Share employee Michael D. "On their way, they saw a teen having a difficult time pedaling his bike on the freeway. It turned out he had lost control and hit the guard rail, which took a chunk out of his leg, literally! They placed his bike in the back seat and brought him home. On their way back from New York, they stopped to check in on him, and the family was so grateful they had cared enough to help in the first place... and then also stopping by on their way back from vacation!"

So, how can we start to truly love others the way God loves us? Well, how about starting with our neighbors? Is there someone new to your street? Or a struggling family just trying to stay above water? Invite them over for a cookout at your house or take them a warm meal, as one CCM employee described her new neighbors doing for them.

We can pray and start to ask God to transform our hearts to help us see others as He sees them. Ask Him how we can apply this command practically in our everyday lives, and remember:

"The Christian life is marked by a focus on God and our neighbors. The more we love Him, the more we learn to love our neighbors. And the more we love our neighbors, the more we become like Christ. We get closer to God with each act of love, and each act of love brings someone else closer to Him as well."