

# The greatest thing you can do for someone else # 3 in *The Essentials*

Message for Sunday, January 25, 2015  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 22:24-27

**Children's Message:** from Galatians 6:7, "You reap whatever you sow."

Have a plant pot filled with potting soil. With the children, plant flower seeds in the pot. "What do you think will come up here?" "What if we planted corn or tomatoes?"

Explain the principle, "You reap whatever you sow." This is true for other things besides seeds. What would happen if you were mean and nasty to everyone around you; you were suspicious of everyone; you cheated people every chance you had? How would people treat you?

What if you "plant love"? What if you treat others with respect: listen to what others say, even if you disagree with them; show that you care about others, and help others? What will be the result? Yes, you might get a few "weeds", that is, people who are still nasty. But mostly you will get back what you give out. You will get back respect, care and love.

Jesus sends us out with the message of love, and to do deeds of love.

**Sermon** "The greatest thing you can do for someone else" # 3 in *The Essentials*

## 1) The greatest thing we do for others: love them

I was once with a young person who was pointing out all the things in her world that were wrong. Her negative attitude got to me and I finally said, "There are two types of people in the world. The one kind see a problem and complain about it. The other kind see a problem and do something to help. Which kind do you want to be in your life?"

Thinking later about that conversation, I realized what I was getting at the was the value of loving others.

Let's go back and revisit one of the Bible verses we looked at last Sunday. A lawyer put Jesus to the test with this question, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Hear Jesus' answer:

**Matthew 22:37-40, New International Version:**

**Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'**

**This is the first and greatest commandment. And the**

**second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."**

Last week we looked at the first part of that, loving God. We saw that the way we love God is to obey God. Today we're looking at the second part: loving other people.

Love is an attitude which is focussed on meeting the needs of other people. Here are two examples.

Many of us are afraid of dogs. It is a common fear. The great scientist Louis Pasteur was frightened of dogs, but far more than most people. He was *terrified* of dogs. Even the sound of a bark far off in the distance would cause him to tremble with fear. The root of this came on a day when he was a young boy. A rabid wolf had raged through his village, attacking many of his neighbours. Those who were not killed immediately died a lingering, painful death over the next two weeks. Time and again Pasteur said, "I have always been haunted by the cries of those victims."

Yet in 1882, when he was past the age of 60, Pasteur gave up all his other studies in an intense search for a cure for rabies. For three long years, in spite of his deep-seated fears, he risked his life by living with mad dogs. At last he came through with a vaccine to cure the victims of rabies. On a night in July of 1885, he tried the first injection on a little boy whose life seemed doomed. The boy lived. The memory of the agony of his neighbours spurred Louis Pasteur to find a cure for this dreaded disease.

The second example moves from the sublime to the ridiculous. You may know of Garfield, the world famous cat. In one cartoon, on a bitter cold winter day, Garfield is seated in a comfortable chair in front of a fireplace. He sees his friend Odie outside the window, shivering, peering in, hoping that someone will let him in. Garfield says to himself, "Poor Odie. Locked outside in the cold. I just can't bear to see him like this. I gotta do something." So Garfield gets up from his chair and closes the curtains!

Friends, the greatest thing you can do for someone is to love them.

## 2) Love meets the needs of people; Love serves

Love is more than a warm feeling. Love is a verb. It is *attitude in action*. Love seeks to serve others, meeting their needs.

Tony Campolo tells about a young woman who made a commitment of her life to Christ, but was still depressed and bored. She went to a psychotherapist for help, but

after several sessions with him, felt that the effort was futile. Then one day she came into her therapist's office, her face radiant with excitement.

"I've had the most wonderful day," she said. "This morning I could not get my car started, so I called the pastor and asked him if he was going into town and could drive me to my appointment with you. He said he would, but he was going earlier to the hospital to make a few calls. I went with him and while he was busy, I visited some elderly people in one of the wards. I read from the Bible and prayed with them. By the time the morning was over, I was higher than a kite. I haven't felt this good in years."

The psychotherapist quickly responded, "Now we know how to make you happy! Our problem is solved! Now we know how to keep you out of the doldrums!"

Much to his surprise, the young woman answered, "You don't expect me to do this sort of thing every day, do you?"

She knew the solution to her problems. She knew how much satisfaction she received in meeting the needs of others, but still she resisted.

There is a powerful force inside each of us which acts like gravity: it pulls us inward, so that we focus on ourselves. This force works not just on people, but on organizations. It happens in churches. They start to be concerned with "How can we pay the bills? How can we maintain the building?" They lose focus of their original purpose, to bring God's love to people, and to bring people to Jesus.

The culture that we live in tries to teach us that the thing greatest things are fame and fortune, power and beauty. You go through the checkout at the grocery store, and that's what is on the covers of all those magazines and tabloids. Think about it: people who are either famous or rich or powerful or beautiful – or all of the above. This is what our culture idolizes.

This series of messages is all about the greatest things in life, the things that *really* matter. Jesus takes the culture of our world and turns it upside down, inside out:

**Luke 22:24-27, Today's English Version:**

An argument came up among the disciples as to which one of them should be thought of as the greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of this world have power over their people, and the rulers are called 'Friends of the People.' But this is not the way it is with you; rather, the greatest one among you must be

like the youngest, and the leader must be like the servant. Who is greater, the one who sits down to eat or the one who serves him? The one who sits down, of course. But I am among you as one who serves."

I'll repeat what I said before, because it is so crucial. Love is more than a warm feeling. Love is a verb. It is *attitude in action*. Love seeks to serve others, meeting their needs.

But we already know all this. So I'm not going to take up any more time telling you what you already know. Instead, I want to encourage you to keep on loving, to not give up, even when it seems useless.

### 3) Nothing is hopeless, no one is worthless, where there is love

Jesus tells us to love our enemies. You may not have any enemies, but we all have people in our lives who are, shall we say, difficult. Maybe you're sitting next to one. Maybe you're the one! In any case, these are the very people we are called to love.

**Matthew 5:46–48, Today's English Version:**

"Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! And if you speak only to your friends, have you done anything out of the ordinary? Even the pagans do that!"

Bill Ankerberg, the pastor of the Homewood Church in Homewood Illinois, told this encouraging story about a girl called "Little Annie."

"Little Annie" was hopelessly insane. As a young girl she was kept in a cage on the lowest level of a Boston asylum. The doctors saw no hope for her, so she was confined to a damp, dark basement, "the dungeon." Here she lived in a world with little light and even less hope. "Little Annie" was like an unpredictable animal. At times, she would violently attack anyone who came near her. At other moments, she stayed in a trance and was seemingly unaware of anyone's presence.

Into this dark dungeon of "Little Annie's" world came an elderly nurse. The nurse had a special compassion for this hopeless cause, and she began to eat her lunch just outside of Annie's cage. The child gave no indication that she even noticed the woman. One day, the nurse left some brownies just outside of "Little Annie's" cage. The girl didn't seem to care. The nurse left them for the girl anyway, and on her return, the brownies were gone. This became a regular appointment for these two women. Each week the nurse brought brownies for "Little

Annie.” They began to eat lunch together, and the hopeless cause began to talk to the nurse.

The doctors began to notice a change in the young girl, and soon she was moved to the main floor. She began to show great improvement, and after several years of treatment it was felt that she was well enough to return to her home. But this hopeless cause decided to stay at the asylum and help others who were without hope, as she had been. Because she had been loved when she was unlovable, she was able to pass that love on to others. Over the years she helped to give hope and new life to many “hopeless cases.”

As a grown woman, one of the most famous children this Anne Sullivan came to help was Helen Keller. Anne was able to work her miracle of love in others, because someone had touched her with the miracle of love.

So, as Paul Harvey on the radio might say, “Now you know the rest of the story.” But, my friends, *you* are the rest of the story. The people that you deal with, even the difficult ones – *especially* the difficult ones – are the ones God has given to you to love. Never give up. Never lose hope. No one is worthless. God loves them all, and so should we. And who knows... you may bring a miracle to pass in someone’s life, and they can pass it on to someone else...

#### **Next Steps:**

- Pray and think: Who/Where/How can I love and serve? How can I make a difference in the world?
- Ask the same question about St. Paul’s Church: How can we keep our focus outward, rather than inward?