

*The Jesus Now Sermon Series Begins!*

We are living in an extraordinary moment in time when God is awakening the world through the reconciling love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. What if the Lord was already awakening you, your family, your church, your city? Are you open to His Spirit sweeping through your life? Because of Jesus, our churches, nation, and lives will never be the same again.

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**I. Introduction: Awakening to a World in Pain (Matthew 24:12).**

Our world today is full of hurting people who need the love of a caring God and are searching for someone to come alongside and minister that love in a relevant, effective way.

- We live in a time when love is growing cold. “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). Headlines are full of betrayal, broken commitments, children left unprotected, terrorism, “ethnic cleansing.”
- We live in a world full of people in pain. “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). People are wounded and scarred by family fragmentation, abandonment, rejection, materialism, addiction, abuse.

Tragically, when many of the pain-filled have needed care, their pain has often been compounded.

**Bread or Stones?**

Luke 11:11–13 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Needed a “fish”... but received a “snake”...

Needed an “egg”... but received a “scorpion”...

Needed “bread”... but received “stones”...

- People have needed security of stable homes, but have received breakdown of marriages and families.
- People have needed warmth of caring affection, but have received abuse at the hand of pleasure takers.
- People have needed affirmation of worth and value, but have received the devaluation of betrayal and discrimination.

We are living in a day in which people have needed “bread” and have received “stones.”

Hurting people are looking for the real God, but when they hear that He is, for example, the Father of compassion and God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3), they still don’t know who He is because they have yet to experience from caring followers of Jesus what comfort looks and feels like. God wants to involve us in sharing Great Commandment care to people around us who, in a way, are like the traveler lying by the road in the story of the Good Samaritan—wounded, hurting, afraid, and alone.

## II. What sort of people ought we to be?

*“Since everything will (one day) be destroyed, what kind of people ought you to be?” (2 Peter 3:11).*

The emphasis in the passage above is clearly upon becoming the kind of people God wants us to be, not worrying about temporal things that will one day disappear. The Great Commandment to love will challenge us to become a Good Samaritan for the twenty-first century.

### A. A New Question Depicting Great Commandment Love

Luke 10:34b–35 “(The Samaritan) . . . bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ Which of these three (priest, Levite, Samaritan) do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

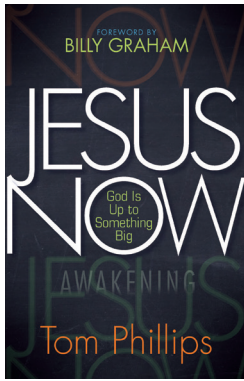
Jesus reframed the question of the religious leader from one that suggests limits of duty to one that reflects depth of care, grace, and compassion. Rather than “Who is my neighbor?” he asks, “Who was a neighbor?” Great Commandment love is made manifest as we become good neighbors to those God allows us to know—especially those nearest us and those we find in pain along the roads of life. Imagine a vision of the church—followers of Jesus—going and doing likewise as they cross the road to give care to those in pain. That is what a hurting world needs, and God wants to give.

### B. Contrasting Responses to a Person in Pain

Picture this one traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who finds himself overtaken by thieves, robbed, beaten, and laid beside the road to die. He hears the priest coming. Can you imagine the possible excitement

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*Great Commandment care is much more about who you are becoming than about what you do or how much you do.*



God's desire is to draw all people to Himself. Why should this profound truth matter? Because we are living in an extraordinary moment when God is awakening the world through the reconciling love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. What is your place in God's Great Awakening?

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Colossians 3:16 Moment:

**"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . ." (Col. 3:16).**

**Pastor/Teacher:**

Vulnerably share about a time when you did not love others well.

*"I know at times I have not loved others well when \_\_\_\_\_"*



**W-3** Yielding to the Scripture's protective cautions and transforming power to bring life-change in me

and hope, sensing it is a "righteous" man? But the priest passes by him. Imagine again that he hears the Levite coming even as the traveler, the text states, is half dead. And the Levite also passes by him. Then and now, the pain of many people is accentuated by the irrelevance of religion that does not reflect the caring heart of God.

- The priest saw the man and passed by on the other side.
- A Levite saw the man and passed by on the other side.
- A Samaritan saw him, took pity on him, and went to him.

"Which of these three . . . was a neighbor to the man . . . 'The one who had mercy on him' . . . 'Go and do likewise'" (Luke 10:36–37).

The Samaritan crossed the road! When he noticed the wounded man, he took thought of him and then took initiative to help. He acted out of who he had become—a person who cares—who takes thought of others. All too often, the ordeal and struggle of people in pain has been made worse by a form of religion that was neither helpful nor relevant.

### ***C. Walking in the Light of God's Son . . . Through Fresh Encounters with Jesus (John 12:35, 8:12)***

*"Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh . . . but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).*

As we embrace the imperative of our personal prayer for a Jesus-Now Awakening, let's quietly pray King David's prayer: "Create in me a clean heart, O God . . ." (Psalm 51:10).

Reflect on a recent time in your life when you did NOT love others well. Share your thoughts with Jesus. Tell Him about your sadness and regret.

*Lord, I know at times I have not love well when . . .*

Now prepare for a time of cleansing and renewal with Jesus.

Lord, by Your Spirit, would You remove anything from my life that hinders the expression of Your love. Cleanse me, forgive me, empower me to live and love like Jesus.

### **III. What aloneness is to be removed?**

When God said in Genesis 2:18 that it is not good for man to be alone, He revealed a fundamental aspect of human beings. We are created for meaningful relationship with God and with others. Therefore, if isolated or disconnected from those who love and care for us, we have a dilemma. Notice that the first act of ministry by the Good Samaritan was that, rather than seeing the man on the side of the road and passing by, he crossed the road, removing the aloneness of the one lying there half dead.

#### ***A. Irrelevant Questions for People in Need***

In the story of the Good Samaritan, imagine the priest and Levite walking down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, coming upon the wounded man lying on the other side. Could it be that they prayed for the man as they

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*Don't miss the powerful simplicity in his simply crossing the road and "being with" the one lying beside the road.*

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*God created marriages, families, and fellowship (koinonia) within the Church to remove our interpersonal aloneness.*

passed by? Might they have called out a scriptural truth or offered spiritual pep talks as they passed by? Considering that this road may have wound through the very area referred to in Psalm 23 as the valley of the shadow of death, they might have said, "Do not be afraid, the Lord is with you!"

- There's certainly benefit in prayer and truth, but unless we first minister to the aloneness, the prayers and scriptures we quote may have little impact.
- The first thing the Samaritan did was to move across the road to minister to the aloneness that was there.
- That's the power of what God has done through relationships, for it is relationships that God has created to remove aloneness.

### ***B. Learning to Look for Aloneness***

1. **STOP** and notice people: (See Mark 5—Jesus stops when touched.) They may be people closest to you—roommates, family members, spouses, work associates, fellow Bible study participants. Stop and notice. Much about learning to care effectively for others is learning to give close attention, and that is difficult to do if you are too busy with activities, tasks, or other things. Expect "divine encounters." Slow down and pause to notice.

2. **LOOK** for the pain of aloneness: (See John 5—man beside the pool) Notice the symptoms or manifestations of aloneness in this context. People face losses, trauma, broken relationships, or failures, but often face them alone. When pain is dealt with alone, it may be manifested in symptoms such as withdrawal, anger, control, manipulation, procrastination, physical disorders, etc. Look for the pain of aloneness that may be made evident in various symptoms.

3. **LISTEN** for words of aloneness: (See John 4—woman at the well)

Listen for pain beneath the surface. Sometimes aloneness is revealed by incessant words or quick spiritual platitudes that seek to disguise the lonely, disconnected heart underneath. At times, the words are cries for help, such as, "I don't know if I can go on." Jesus spoke to the lack of lasting relationships in the woman's life—with Him and her husbands.

People in pain: Think of some of your friends, relatives, church members, work associates, or others you suspect are in pain—hurting over a loss or rejection, discouraged by a failure, or afraid of the future. List some of them here along with the issues they are facing.

#### **People in Pain**

#### **Issues Facing Them**

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Pause quietly and pray specifically for the persons you listed, asking God if He would want you to be a part of removing their aloneness and further equip you to give care to them.

### **C. Removing Aloneness as a Person of Care**

Care is communicated and aloneness is removed when we come to know people, take initiative to care, and vulnerably share our own lives in appropriate ways.

**1. Coming to Deeply Know People:** People are longing to be known. You may be able to communicate this by saying, “Take as long as you need to take. I want to understand what’s going on in your life,” or “I want to enter your world and be with you.” People need to be known—especially people in pain.

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*Just as Jesus left His world to enter ours and to know us, we can join with Him in coming to know others. Becoming a Good Samaritan means coming to deeply know people so that we might care for them.*

#### **The Story of Mark**

Mark kept getting into trouble at school and being constantly disciplined. During a conversation with the principal, Mark was asked about having to stay after school so often. Mark answered, “Well, at least when I have to stay after school, my teacher likes spending time with me.” As he explored further, the principal came to find out that Mark’s single-parent mom had taken a second job in order to try to make ends meet and that little Mark was anxious about going home to face those three hours alone without his mother.

Listen to the words of aloneness. You’ll discover that in his acting out, Mark was finding a blessing. He found what he needed to remove his aloneness—a teacher’s being there with him—somebody who cares.

**2. Taking Initiative to Express Care:** There is no more important word, related to caregiving, than initiative that leads us to ask, “Who moves first?” The Good Samaritan didn’t wait for the wounded traveler to crawl over to him. The Good Samaritan took initiative and crossed the road. There is a powerful ministry in moving first—speaking first, writing first, calling first, giving first. We remove aloneness from people who are in pain when we take initiative to care . . . to “give first” just as He first gave Himself.

The Lord portrayed initiative in caring. None of us sought after Him, but He came, taking the initiative to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

#### **Walking in the Light of God’s Word . . . Through Frequent Experiences of Scripture (John 12:35, Psalms 119:105)**

*“He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less” (John 3:30).*

This passage of Scripture reveals a critical imperative to living a life of personal revival. It will require a two-dimensional imperative: He must increase, and I must decrease!

The imperative is not just for John the Baptist, but for each Spirit-empowered follower. Practically though, what does it look like for Jesus to gain prominence? Think about your daily living, your thoughts and activities, your attitudes and priorities. Scripture reminds us that:

- His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8).
- His activity is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, and never the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–23).

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*The Lord portrayed initiative in caring. None of us sought after Him, but He came, taking the initiative to seek and to save the lost.*

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*When we truly experience and express Great Commandment love through our lives, it will startle the world around us.*

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

**“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).**

**Pastor/Teacher:**

Vulnerably share one of the five evidences from your story of *Jesus increasing* and *you decreasing*.



**W-6** Encountering Jesus in the Word for deepened transformation in Christ-likeness

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*Appropriate vulnerability about your own painful journeys reveals the humility, wonder, and gratitude that result from God's care of you—the true motivation for your caregiving*

- His attitude is characterized by humility and thinking more highly of others (Philippians 2: 3).
- His priorities focus on loving His Father, loving people, and imparting the gospel, that others might embrace Him and these priorities (Matthew 22:37–40, 28:19, 20).

As Jesus continues to increase and we continue to decrease, every part of our lives will be impacted.

Pause and reflect on these sentences; celebrate any evidence of how Jesus is increasing:

1. I recently was having more of His thoughts as I . . .
2. Recently, in my daily activity, I sensed the fruit of His Spirit when . . .
3. His attitude of humility and thinking of others was evident recently as I . . .
4. His priority of loving God and other people was expressed recently when . . .
5. His priority of sharing my life and the gospel was recently demonstrated as I . . .

Celebrate one or more of these evidences of His increase and then pray for one another. Pray that these changes will continue and that each of you will decrease because a Jesus-Now Awakening is characterized by evidences of His thinking and activity, His attitude and priorities.

**3. Letting Others Know Me:** A part of being a person of care is to let others know me and my story at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Such vulnerability reveals the real reason and motivation behind your caring for others—gratitude and wonder for the way God has cared for you. It also conveys humility, indicating that we all need this ministry of care.

- Vulnerable disclosure does not “take” compassion or attention. The focus should remain on the one in pain.
- The purpose for vulnerable sharing from the caregiver’s story is to remove the aloneness of the one in pain.
- Such self-disclosures should be testimonies of gratitude for the care we have received. There is powerful ministry through simply letting people know that at times we, too, have hurt.

You are capable of touching the aloneness of people in pain as you become a person of care—a person committed to knowing people, to taking initiative, and to being appropriately vulnerable.

#### **IV. A Power to Embrace: The Wonder of His Care**

Matthew 10:8 says, “Freely you have received, freely give.”

What is it that motivates us to cross that road to care for people? It is the wonder that you have been cared for by Him. Could it be that the Good Samaritan had previously received care from the Lord possibly ministered through another? When was it that he freely received of the grace and care of somebody else? We don’t know. The text doesn’t tell us. But the

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*You are capable of touching the aloneness of people in pain as you become a person of care—a person committed to knowing people, to taking initiative, and to being appropriately vulnerable.*

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*Gratitude and wonder for the love and care we have received from God is what will keep us from viewing caregiving as an obligation and a duty.*

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*As we trust the Lord to care for us, we will be awed again by His startling love for us, and that wonder will empower us in a supernatural way to care for others.*



principles of Scripture suggest that he had. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John. 4:19). Gratitude and wonder for the love and care we have received from God is what will keep us from viewing caregiving as an obligation and a duty.

#### **A. Constrained by Love**

We are empowered to give to and to care for others by the wonder and awe that fills our souls as we contemplate how our good God has met us, and continues to meet us, at our points of need. All other motivations will eventually be lacking and unsustainable. Only God’s unending and unlimited love and care for us will keep us eventually from regarding caring for others as a duty and obligation.

#### **B. Experience the Wonder of His Care: “Be Still”**

“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6).

Why does God tell us **not** to frantically seek after things — but to seek the Lord (Matthew 6:33)? The answer may be found in Psalms 23:6. Remember the one lying beside the road in the valley of the shadow of death? Not only are we told that the Lord is with us, but also, that goodness and loving kindness will follow us all the days of our lives.

- If God can get us to be still, His goodness and mercy will catch up to us.
- If we continue chasing those other things, goodness and mercy will never find us.

The meditation that follows may be helpful in landing this truth in your heart.

#### **Walking in the Light of God’s Son . . . Through Frequent Encounters with Jesus (John 8:12; 12:35)**

Consider a time when you were needy and alone. Maybe it was a time of disappointment or rejection. First, imagine that at your point of need—your point of aloneness—the Lord quiets your spirit, causing you to pause and be still.

- Now, imagine—picture in your heart—you’re looking over your shoulder and see goodness and mercy chasing you.
- Then picture in your heart the Lord Jesus, in all of His abundance and love, pursuing you. Be still and let Him overtake you—embrace you—bless you.
- Then, pray something like this:

*Heavenly Father,*

*It is abundantly clear and true that I have been cared for by You. I have been touched by You, Jesus. At my points of aloneness and neediness, I have been blessed abundantly by You. Might the wonder of such care prompt me across the road to touch other people with the care with which I’ve been touched. Thank You that I have freely received and out of the wonder and gratitude for your care, might I freely give. Thank You for the privilege of doing that. In Christ’s name, I pray.*