



Heal Our Land
Part 2 – Love Your Neighbor
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Do you remember when your family was going out of town for a little while and your dad called a neighbor and said, “We’ll be out of town for a while; could you keep an eye on the place?” How many of you remember a parent doing that? We don’t really do that anymore. We have ADT, right? We don’t need our neighbors casing the joint. Raise your hand if you remember when your mom sent you to a neighbor for a missing ingredient in something she was making. Young people are going, “You did what? We go to Sunfest when we are missing an ingredient.” We used to actually go to our neighbor’s house to get whatever ingredient we needed.

What else, as neighbors, did we do? Yell it out. First service really got into this. Mow lawns. For free? Good for you. That was a good parent. Water their plants when they were away. Shovel snow. There’s a very passionate group back there about feeding cats. Is that a request or are you remembering something from when you were a child? Rake the leaves. Do you know what somebody said in the first service? “We’re going away for a while; keep an eye on our children.” Did you know that was an option? I never knew that was an option. What a great option. The lady said, “No, for teenagers, so there were no wild parties.” Did everybody get caught by a neighbor with a wild party? Those were the good neighbors.

My dad is a ham radio operator and he had a friend two miles down the road that had a police scanner on all the time. Does anybody know what I’m talking about? I can’t remember how many times I got pulled over by the police between age 16 and 18. It may have been once or six times. I don’t know for sure, but my dad knew about it every time when I got home because he tuned in and listened to the whole thing because of his nosy neighbor. His garage door found a few eggs from time to time. I’m just kidding; I never did that. I would never do that. Has anybody ever had conflict with a neighbor that never got resolved?

Today we are talking about loving your neighbor. We’re talking about loving people who are like you and people who are not. We’re looking at what Jesus gave as the greatest commandment: God is the source of life, the source of love, and then we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. He quotes from Leviticus 19. I want you to turn to Leviticus 19; I don’t want you to turn to Matthew. We’re going to look at Matthew and then jump into Leviticus 19 as we see the heart of God in loving our neighbors. This is super important because this has always been a big part of what we’re doing at Woodland Hills Family Church.

Every week, we're thinking about environments and experiences for two people. There are only two people in here today. We have family members. Some have been here for 14, going on 15 years. And we have a lot of guests. So, we have **members and guests**. Our desire has always been to show love and kindness and think through both people here.

Some of you may have gone to a church growing up where the focus was on the membership. Everything was done with the members in mind. I'm seeing some people nodding at me right now. It was all about what we wanted, what we desired. But, we're thinking through every week and we spend a lot of time thinking through the guest.

I don't know if you were in this service last week, but we had three tour busses. We ran out of room. The last two Sundays, we've had right at 1,950 people on campus, so we are trying to figure out what to do. It just seems rude to not allow tour busses in our church. I don't know how we would keep them away. They find the coupons, right? I don't know how they do this, but... One bus showed up late and they all went over to the chapel and enjoyed that environment. There were several people in the second service last week that usually go to the first service. They walked up to me and said, "I don't know anybody here!" and I'm like "Neither do I!"

You hear that a lot more at Woodland Hills because we have a lot of guests. We desire to make sure that this isn't a VIP club. In the 90s, we rebelled against this and church leadership rebelled against just taking care of membership. The church growth movement was ignited and we started to think only about the guests. We believe a healthy church loves and cares for both member and guest.

I went to a restaurant with my family a couple of years ago in Springfield. It was a new restaurant and we were excited to try it out. We walked in and got a table. The place was packed and the service was just not there. We weren't getting food. But they made this huge mistake of putting a VIP table in the middle of the restaurant. The chef and the sous chef and all the staff would walk out every five to ten minutes with like a seven-course meal that they were serving all these VIPs. They were explaining the food... Our waitress got so embarrassed that she didn't even come by our table anymore.

An hour later, we still didn't have food. Every time the chef brought out new food, you could see it in the whole restaurant. We were all very frustrated. I looked at the guy next to me and said, "I'm going to tackle him the next time he comes out. Whatever comes out of that kitchen is coming to this table." We left and Amy and I, as church leaders, in our hearts, were thinking, *They were prepared for somebody tonight, but they weren't prepared for us.*

Some of you may have felt that way in a church before. They were prepared for the members, but they weren't prepared for you.

Growing up, we went to a church that when you were a guest at the church, we made you stand up and we put a guest sticker on you. We wanted everybody to know. We called them out. "Pegan is in the church today." Does anybody know what I'm talking about?

It's never happened at a church I've been in, but I've heard about some churches that have songs they sing to guests. And they make the guests stand up and everybody sings to the guests. I thought we would try that this morning. No, we're not going to do that. Could you imagine everybody standing up and all of us singing "Be our guest, be our guest..." So long as there is breath in my lungs, that won't ever happen here I can promise you.

Our desire is to love those we know and we're comfortable with... Next week, when we look at *Love Your Enemy*, we are going to see that Jesus says there is no skill in loving easy-to-love people. That requires no skill. That's next week. This week we are talking about loving those people you get comfortable with and, at the same time, showing the same level of love to the people that maybe you don't.

Here's what Jesus said Matthew 22. We call this the Great Commandment. You have the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Jesus gave the Great Commandment, speaking on love and the Great Commission is what, as followers of Jesus, we are called to go and do, making disciples of all nations. **34** *Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees (religious leaders), the Pharisees got together.* They wanted to trip Jesus up, asking him questions that they thought he couldn't answer. **35** *One of them, an expert in the law (the professor), tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

I asked you to turn to Leviticus 19. If we look back at the law, that's like a snippet or what I would call a subunit of all the hundreds of laws that Jesus is going to quote from on loving your neighbor as yourself. But, we don't start there; we start with the source. Your neighbor is not your source of love. If you're having a difficult time with a neighbor, you don't look to them to make changes; you look within.

37 *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* He is the source of love. God is love. We love because he first loved us. **38** *This is the first and greatest commandment.* We have the ability to love and the capacity to love because we have been loved. **39** *"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" You'll see that it is in quotes and we are going to go to Leviticus 19 in just a second, but stay here for a moment because Jesus is not teaching us, followers of Jesus, how to love ourselves. The idea here is not self-love; the idea here is general welfare. You and I know how to take care of our general welfare. We know how to feed ourselves. We know how to clothe ourselves. We know how to put shelter over ourselves and our family. We know that. Jesus is saying have the same concern for this person over here that you have for yourself. Be moved in your heart towards the person who needs food, shelter, and clothing. 40 "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

So, here's the first of two big ideas this morning as we talk about loving your neighbor.

We must be as concerned for the welfare of our neighbors as we are for ourselves. This is very important. We are going to talk now about who your neighbors are. Who are the ones we are called to love? Before we jump into this, I want to make it very clear that we are speaking today from the church, not the government. We're speaking today about my role and responsibility as a citizen of heaven. Two weeks ago, we tackled what it means to be a citizen of heaven and a citizen of the United States.

Today, we're not talking about policies and strategies and what we're going to do. We're going to talk about that at the very end and how to pray for all of those in leadership. We are talking today about what is moved in your heart when this people group is mentioned. When someone you don't feel comfortable with is mentioned, what is going on in your heart? We're not talking about policies, politics, or government today.

So, let's look at who your neighbor is. **Your neighbors are young and old.** How many of you had a somewhat cranky person down the street? You hit the ball in their yard and they kept it. Did anybody have that type of a neighbor? Yes! Love that person right there. Love the one who just looks at all teenagers as riffraff. They just see you coming and say, "There's trouble right there." Your neighbors are young and old. I grew up in a very multi-generational neighborhood. We had senior adults all the way down to young families. We've kind of lost this idea of neighborhood, being neighbors to one another.

Your neighbors are republican and democrats. Your neighbors who have your same worldview and people who do not. I'm telling you these are the ones we are called to love.

Let's take it a step further because this gets close to home with what's going on in the news right now. **Your neighbors are Trump supporters and Trump protestors.** Right now... It's okay; I want you to go wherever the Lord leads you in this message. Some of you are wondering if you should laugh or not; if that was meant to be funny or are we being serious. I can tell you that we are being very serious, but I'm asking you to stay focused on what the Lord is doing in your heart this morning.

When I look at Trump supporters and Trump protestors, I'll be honest with you... This isn't a democrat or republican thing. I was deeply saddened by the way Vice-President-Elect Pence was treated on Broadway this past weekend. It just saddened me and I'll tell you why. When I saw it on the news... If you haven't seen it, he and his daughter and nieces were booed at as they walked into Hamilton on New York's Broadway. It just killed me. And then at the end, the cast felt they needed to lecture him.

I've been watching this, as many of you have, and it took me back immediately to 1999. At that time, I was at a leadership summit at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, Illinois. Pastor Bill Hybels, a mentor of mine from a distance... I was 24 or 25 years old. I'm not in the mood to do math this morning; it's been a very challenging morning. So, I was very impressionable. He stood up... I could tell he was passionate that morning. I think it was day two of the conference. He had announced it that morning and it was in a letter in our packet when we got there that right after lunch. President Bill Clinton would be coming in to address thousands of evangelical Christians. He was going to do a Q & A with Bill Hybels. When that announcement was made, Pastor Bill Hybels had started receiving emails and letters from pastors saying, "I make no excuse for the fact that I hate that man."

Bill Hybels... It was like a John Wayne moment. He walked up on stage and he just asked all these Evangelical Christian leaders, "When did God change the hate rule? Somebody needs to help me with this." This was before lunch. We had to clear out for about two hours so the dogs could come in and they could have Secret Service clear the area.

He said, "Let me explain something to you. When the President of the United States walks out on this stage, you will stand up and show respect for the position of the office." He just went into it and I was just sitting there listening intently.

Some of you right now, I'm just asking the Lord and the Holy Spirit to call you by name with what's going on in your heart. When Bill Clinton walked out on stage, I sat there with thousands of Christian leaders. I was the youngest punk in the room. And I may have led out the charge, when he walked out on stage, to jump out of my seat and start applauding because I was told to.

I did it in the first service and I'll do it again. I hope you respond... I had to do this twice to get the proper response. I would hope that if Vice-President Joe Biden showed up to Branson, Missouri and went to a show in Branson, Missouri, one, he would most definitely not be booed and two, I hope that we would show him love and respect for the work he's done over the last eight years. Let's try it again. No, that was 50%. He just walked into a Branson show and our response is... (cheers and applause) Vice President Biden, this is your official welcome from Branson, Missouri. We welcome you to our city and we will show you the love and respect that comes with the office of Vice-President. We commit to that. I hope that's in your heart.

After the first service, somebody said, "I did it, but it wasn't in my heart." Isn't that where we're at though. Don't you feel that every morning you get up and you talk to people as you go through town...

Your neighbors are Christians and Muslims. Love your neighbor as yourself. Be as concerned for the general welfare of that other person as you are your person.

Your neighbors are citizens and refugees. Let me remind you again that we are not talking politics or policies. We're talking people. We're talking your neighbors.

Your neighbors are citizens and immigrants. Legal and illegal. Again, we're not talking policies or politics; we're talking people.

Your neighbors are White and Native Americans. I have a dear friend in this church who was ordained here earlier this year, Brad Hutchcraft. I enjoy sitting down with Brad. He has a great sense of humor. We enjoy ministry together. God has given him a passion and a heart for the Native Americans. As we were talking, I was asking him for all sorts of feedback and thoughts for this week. He sent me a bunch of stuff and this one really hit me and I want to share it with you. This is what Brad said. *"Those who have been our neighbors the longest are those who were here first, the Native Americans. The pilgrims recognized these neighbors and reached out to them, inviting them to the first Thanksgiving. In fact, if it hadn't been for them loving us enough to teach us key tips to surviving in this new land, the original settlers most likely wouldn't have survived. They were at the first Thanksgiving, but have been absent from the table ever since."*

Your neighbors are black and white. If you have been around this area for any length of time and have driven south on 65 and hit Harrison, Arkansas, you more than likely have seen a billboard that looks like this. The billboard says, "It's not racist to love your people. White Pride Radio.com."

I hope, follower of Jesus, that this absolutely breaks your heart. I hope you drive by this and are frustrated or whatever the language is: disgusted, angered... I hope when you see people coming against people of another race... You may be thinking it's not racist to love your people. Here's the next big idea for the morning.

It is not racist to love your people, but it is racist to love only your people. That's exactly what we are going to see in Leviticus 19. As God is sharing with the Israelite, he's saying you're to have a love for your countrymen, you're to have a love for your people, but what we are going to see is the heart of God for all people. When it says love your neighbor as yourself, it's speaking of all people.

Let's look at Leviticus 19. You'll remember we were in this text when we went through the Book of Ruth. We looked at the gleaning laws. This text starts off with the gleaning laws. **9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God."** In other words, your harvesting is taking care of your general welfare, feeding your family, feeding families within your community. God's heart for this was as you harvest, don't only be thinking about yourself and your family, be thinking about others. He put it into the law. This is his heart.

Then he goes on to how to love your people, how to love your fellow Israelite. It goes on to say, **11 "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another."** This is in the law. **12 "Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord."** You are going to see "your people" and "I am the Lord" throughout this whole text. **13 "Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. 14 Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord."** He is the source of all life and the source of all of this loving one another. **15 "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. 16 Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord."** It's very clear. We are seeing the heart of God here.

17 "Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. 18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."

You're thinking, *Okay so we just talked about your people and how to love your fellow Israelites. That's what Jesus is quoting, Ted.* That part there is speaking of loving your fellow Israelite. Go down a little bit further to Verse 33.

33 "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you..." Again, this is the heart of God. **"...must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt."** I always love historical perspective. History always takes us back to a place where we need to be reminded. Remember how you were treated as slaves in Egypt. Remember how you wanted to be treated. Remember how you wanted to be cared for.

“I am the Lord your God.” So, not only should you be concerned for yourself and your neighbors, but let me give you a few more of these big ideas.

We should be concerned for the welfare of immigrants and citizens. Again, when you see it on the news... And some of you are like *We’re building a wall; we’re sending them out of here.* I hope that your heart is that not one immigrant in our country would ever be mistreated under any circumstance. Again, we’re not talking politics or policies right now; we’re talking about the heart. We’re talking about what happens in your heart when you hear immigrant mentioned.

We should be concerned for the welfare of refugees and citizens. Again, we’re not dealing with how they come into the country or how many of them come into the country. We are talking specifically about the person.

Amy’s grandparents lived in Owatonna, Minnesota pretty much their whole lives. When the Somalian refugees were coming into our nation, tens of thousands of them were placed in Minnesota. A lot of them ended up in Owatonna, Minnesota. So, here you have this white, upper farming community, and at the end of the street is an apartment complex. The saddest part for me through the whole thing was no one ever worked with this community and the refugees coming in, teaching them how to be neighbors. I have to be honest with you. I don’t think teaching them how to be neighbors is the responsibility of the government. It’s the responsibility of the church, teaching them how to love because they didn’t know what to do or how to handle it. Talk about two completely different ways of life.

Now we are dealing with Syrian refugees. I want to encourage you, follower of Jesus, to not get caught up in the policies to the point where your heart turns bitter. We, as followers of Jesus, do not live in fear. We live in love. We don’t make decisions on how we value a person based on fear. We make decisions on how we value a person based on love.

If I can be super honest with you for just a second, I am very, very, very proud of my Southern Baptist brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not a Southern Baptist church, but I’m friends with many of them... and that’s okay. In their convention this summer, they made the decision to be the church. Southern Baptists started adopting Syrian refugee families. This is directly out of the proclamation they made. They said, “We want to encourage Southern Baptist churches and families to welcome and adopt refugees into their churches and homes as a means to demonstrate to the nations that our God longs for every tribe, tongue, and nation to be welcomed at his throne.” I am proud of you guys. I am proud of you for stepping up and being the church.

My new friend, Pastor Bryant Wright from Johnson Ferry Baptist Church... I was with them a couple of weeks ago. Their church has adopted ten Syrian refugee families. You’ll read about this in the New York Times and it’s in all the newspaper. The media doesn’t know what to do with the church that starts loving refugees, especially when they have labeled the church a hate group. They really don’t know what to do with the church taking a strong stance on the unborn, a church taking a strong stance on traditional family and marriage. They don’t understand and I’m convinced the church alone, without government help, can help the Syrian refugees in our nation.

This is one family I want to introduce you to. This Anwar and Deline. We don't know their last name. They are keeping their faces and their last name hidden for fear of reprisals against family back in Syria. They fled the bombing of their home town in 2012, crossed over into Jordan, and now they find themselves in the suburbs of Atlanta. This family came with two children and they had another child in August. Anwar has heart problems, but he's excited to get that heart surgery taken care of so that he can get back to work. He hasn't been watching the news in our nation and all the hatred that's being spun out there every single day for all of us to absorb and take into our hearts and lash out with. He's not been watching it and do you know what he says? He says since coming to America, all he has experienced is love. Where did he experience that love? The church.

Do you know what impresses me about this picture? This right here is William Stocks. He is a 23-year-old, white republican from Alabama. I would like to repeat that for you for just a moment. He is a 23-year-old millennial from Alabama. I'm letting the policy be other there today and we're talking about the people and we're talking about our hearts. Do you know what he does? He shows up after work to teach this family English. This is in his heart. This is his desire. He wants to care for these people. Everything you see in this kitchen has been donated to this family. They already have one of the families completely off government support and their desire is to help all these families off government support and even if the church has to keep helping them, eventually, they want them to assimilate. This is the heart of the church.

For some of you right now, your politics and your passion for keeping our nation safe is getting in the way of what God is wanting to do in your heart today. Your 24-hour news cycle has been crushing your soul and you need to be praying, "Holy Spirit, call me by name on my heart towards people of every tribe, tongue, and nation." That's what needs to be happening today.

Dr. Russell Moore, speaking on behalf of the Southern Baptists, said this. *"It's not unusual that we have politicians timid in the face of fear."* I'll remind you, follower of Jesus, we are not supposed to be timid in the face of fear. We are supposed to be love in the face of fear. *"But the task of the church is a different one. The church is called to see the image of God in all people..."* We said this in number three of the four... NOTA was the most watched message in our church's history. *None of the Above* was right before the election. And we were fired up and ready to go. We stated what we believed and number three was we believe all men and women are created in the image of God and they have automatic value. This is the job of the church. The church is called to see the image of God in all people. *"...and to minister Christ's presence to all people. That's what churches are doing."*

So, can I ask you, for application this morning, that you would begin to show concern for the welfare... This is what it means to love your neighbor: that you would be as concerned for the welfare of your black neighbor as you are for your own family. That you would be as concerned for the Native American as you are for your family. Whatever the nationality, whatever the ethnicity, would you ask the Lord to work in your heart today that you would be concerned for the welfare of all your neighbors as you love them.

Here are some of the prayers: Would you ask the Lord to grow your heart in love for the young man wearing a black lives matter t-shirt? You are going to turn on the television and you are going to see protests and you're going to be concerned that they are stopping traffic, etc. Lord, right now, I want you to work on what's going on in the heart.

I talked to a man after the first service. He said, "Since I got saved, the Lord has really been working on my heart with racism. I was all about white pride. I get that, but what I've found as the Lord has been changing my heart is it's like complete and whole reprogramming for me. What I didn't realize this morning was that I was taking that same anger towards the immigrant and towards the refugee."

Would you ask the Lord to grow your heart in love for the immigrant and the refugee? Again, we are talking people, not policies.

This next one is a long prayer and I hope you're praying for our current president and our next president and for our current vice-president and next vice-president. Would you ask the Lord to guide our government leaders, our military leaders, and law enforcement officers as they promote good and punish evil here at home and around the world? Would you begin praying for that now?

This isn't my job. I'm a pastor of a church. Law enforcement within here today, they have one task if you were to boil it down to one statement. Their job is to promote good and punish evil. We need to be as concerned about their lives, we need to be as passionate about praying for them as we are in how God is working in our hearts in all other groups.

The Apostle Paul dealt with this between Jew and Gentile, between the group of the circumcision and the group of the uncircumcision. In Ephesians 2, it says **11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

And I take you to this final verse today in Ephesians 2. **14 For he himself (Jesus) is our peace, who has made the two groups one...**

I believe it's not the role of government to solve racial reconciliation in our country; it's our job. It's the job and the role of the church to make two groups one. We believe Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

...and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...

I am asking, in my own heart... I'll be honest with you. I think the thing that fired me up more than anything was what happened in New York City with Pence. I was ready to go. I was rolling up my sleeves like it's on. Then I'm like "No, no, I'm actually preaching about this this weekend. I should probably bring it down a notch. I'm not going to send out a tweet."

Let's just all stop Tweeting and Facebook updating. I want you to be able to have a good Thanksgiving. I'm just saying, "Lord, start this in me that I would have love in my heart for my people (whatever that means: democrat, republican, nationality, country of origin) whatever that means, as I do for other people. Would you pray that same prayer this week in your heart?"

Father, it's in the name of Jesus we thank you for our time. I pray for President Obama and Vice-President Joe Biden as they begin to transition out of office. I pray for President-Elect Trump and Vice-President-Elect Pence. I pray for our nation. We are praying right now, through this series, that you would heal our land.

We looked at what it means to love each other as Christians last week and this week we are talking about loving those who are like us and those who are not like us. I'm asking in my heart that you do a work, helping me love people that don't think like me, helping me love people that don't look like me, helping me love people that don't dress like me or eat like me. Would you grow that in the heart of everyone in here that claims the name of Jesus Christ? For that we are grateful.

Thank you for what you are doing at Woodland Hills. Thank you as we go out this week to do for one what we can't do for all in giving to children and families this time of year. We love the generosity that comes out of this church at Christmastime. Continue to bless that.

It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.