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SERMON TITLE: How God Helps Us Live for Him

SCRIPTURE: Acts 12:1-16

DATE: August 1, 2021

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**We** heard that we are to Love God and Love Our Neighbor. As we discussed this with Rev. Jim Witherow, who recently led the elders in a mini retreat, we started thinking of the challenges!

You know those neighbors with the dogs that he lets out but forgets to let back in so they bark incessantly. And the neighbors whose fence is falling down—towards your yard! And the folks who hit your car in a parking lot but failed to leave a note.

There's the drunk driver, the rioter, the thief, and the plain old mean human being.

Jim Witherow said, despite all that *Jesus never asks you to do something that he does not provide help.*

So your elders did some homework to see exactly where and how Jesus provides. They chose a verse that shows how Jesus helps us love others and then they make comments on it<sup>1</sup>:

#### **Paul – Power of the Holy Spirit**

Luke 24:49 – Jesus said to them, “And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised.” One day Paul’s neighbor asked him to fix his computer and he was afraid he wouldn’t know how but he asked and the Holy Spirit helped him.

“We are to be willing to help, even when we do not feel competent. Pray and you will find the Lord helps us.”

#### **Jocelyn – Hospitality, regardless of who they are**

Hebrews 13:1-2 – “Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!”

“Reach out to every visitor who comes, no matter who. That’s why you all do Lemonade on the Lawn and potlucks—food, hospitality welcomes people. Do this every week and it makes a difference in how they feel about God’s love.”

#### **Jaime – Leading by Love, the love in the Bible**

1 John 4:8, 12, 16 – “But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” . . . <sup>12</sup> “No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.” . . . <sup>16a</sup> “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.” 1 Cor 13:4-5 – “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.”

“Although we are commanded to love one another, we all feel that we cannot love everyone. But love does not mean affection but to pray for that person. To love, we are not to judge but instead be forgiving. That leads others to do the same.”

#### **Dennis – Keep on doing what you are doing and be generous**

2 Corinthians 8:12, 9:8-10 – “Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. Give according to what you have, not what you don’t have.” <sup>9:8</sup> God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have . . . plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say, “They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever.” For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

“Give what you have; it’s like sowing what you have and God makes you abound. When you want to give, the “want to” is the Holy Spirit rising up in you to help you.”

#### **Marna – When we fail, he is strong**

1 Corinthians 10:13 – “The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.”

“We may often feel that we fail or are not good enough. But God always makes divine provisions for our temptations.”

#### **Jeff – Meet people where they are**

John 8:7 – “They kept demanding an answer, so Jesus stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!”

“The story is about the woman caught in adultery. Others wanted to judge and destroy her. Jesus rescued her. Jesus forgave her and lifted her to a brighter future. He helps us understand the power of meeting people where they are.”

#### **Darrell – Trust that Jesus will be with you**

Matthew 28:20 – “Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

“In a world where Satan has dominion and we are slaves to greed, lust, anger and doubt, it sometimes leaves little room for compassion, concern, sympathy and hope. I thought “I” was going to be forced to change my self to accomplish this massive task. Then I remembered Jesus said “I am always with you.” He never expects us to do anything on our own. Jesus expects us to tap into His “Love, grace and forgiveness” to be able to love wholeheartedly. Turn to Him for strength, especially when the task seems undoable to us.”

<sup>1</sup> These insights were presented at the FPCD Elders meeting on July 22, 2021. To hear what they said during the sermon, go to sermons at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

These are ways that Jesus helps us to reach out to others and minister on behalf of God. Let's name the helps:

1. The Power of the Holy Spirit
2. Angels in our midst that help us
3. God lives in us and loves through us as we refrain from judging
4. As we do what we can do, God multiplies it
5. As we give, God generously gives us more
6. Jesus meets people where they are and gives them hope

John Stott says, "Christ calls his people out and accompanies them."<sup>2</sup>

Peter was with Jesus when he said *I'm sending the Holy Spirit just as the Father promised*. Whatever situation he found himself in, Peter believed God had put him there. Each morning he woke up to a different experience, just like we all do.

Sometimes he was puzzled about what to do, like when he had the vision to go to Cornelius the Gentile's house and he didn't want to do it. But through Jesus' love, he went.

Loving your neighbor is not a program; it is not always easy. It is simply you, and what you do. If you include Jesus and then do what you do, he will make something great happen.

I like to pray. In 2011, a four-year-old boy named Tristan was in the hospital after falling from a third story window. My husband and I got a text at 3 a.m. that he wasn't doing well so we decided to go to the hospital. And when we got there, there were others. Sean and Lucy, Ty Shaw, the Choir Director at Duncanville High School, several nurses and other staff at Children's Hospital. We all prayed. He came through that difficult night.

Two years later, in 2013, when this church did its first Festival of Hope I had not forgotten the prayers of Ty Shaw and his faith. So I called Ty to invite the high school choir to sing with our choir at the Festival. He knew us from that night so he said "Yes." It was our first community liaison. First Presbyterian and Duncanville High School choirs would publically sing about Jesus.

When Duncanville Outreach Center could not get enough food from the North Texas Food Bank, you all filled a truckload. People in Duncanville were fed through your generosity; just like you provided supplies last week for the students at DISD so they could start school strong.

With each of our four festivals, you raised money through auctions, raffles, Bible storytelling, and singing. You planned games for children, and provided booths so small businesses, non-profits, and restaurants could promote their businesses to bring the community together, all to tell the stories from the Bible. Out of the first Community Conversation grew DuncanSwitch Street Market.<sup>3</sup>

Now First Presbyterian has a reputation for good works in the community. God helps us live for him and your reputation follows you.

You all felt comfortable doing auctions. The Presbyterian Women's group started doing them in 1980 as a Christmas event just for ladies. You soon changed it to a fundraiser; later discovering that inviting husbands and others made for a better auction! You added a spaghetti supper as an enticement to come and spend money. COVID did not stop you. You had a spaghetti dinner for pick up and an online auction which raised 2½ times as much! Your 20-year fundraising total is \$26,815. Coupled with the spring plant and bake sale, you have raised \$41,242.

God helps us live for him and your reputation follows you.

You work with what you have and you enjoy. God takes it and makes it great!

When we do these things, there's going to be opposition, like Peter experienced. Sometimes people even lose their lives, but sometimes an angel shows up. You may wonder about angels that are a little more current than Bible times!

Six Catholic nuns wanted to build a chapel for their girls' school in Santa Fe, NM. The architect had died and normal stairs to the choir loft would not fit. What to do? The sisters decided to pray a novena, a nine-day prayer vigil for one request. They prayed for a carpenter like St. Joseph, Jesus' earthly father.

On the ninth day a carpenter showed up. With hammer, a carpenter's square, wooden pegs and a rare wood that was not native to the area, he built a spiral staircase that fit perfectly. He then disappeared without collecting payment for his work. There was no record of him. The only verifiable fact is that the Sisters of Loretto prayed, and their prayers were answered.

We had something similar happen. We had a disaster and this building was flooded. Did you know that for this building, between insurance coverage and Grace Presbytery paying our \$5,000 deductible, as far as we can tell, every repair and upgrade was covered, (except for the restrooms which were done beforehand and it doesn't include the Education Wing).

Loving God and Loving Your Neighbor are challenging! But let's keep doing it! Remember, Jesus never asks you to do something that he does not provide help. And "He is with you always, to the end of the age."

AMEN

<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 211ff.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.duncanville.com/galleries/duncanswitch-street-market/>, accessed July 29, 2021.