

Camelback Bible Church



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## ***GUIDELINES FOR THE FAMILY OF GOD***

The Plan: Reclaiming All Things for God's Glory (Part 5)  
*Exodus 20:3-17, Galatians 5:14, John 15:13, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Galatians 2:20*

We all have plans don't we? Lots of them.

And so does God. He has The Plan. And our great joy is to bring our plans into conformity with his. That's what we've been learning about up till now, in these few weeks together. Let's go back to the Lord and ask him to take us one step further, one step deeper into his plan for this world.

Why did God do it anyway, create human beings? What was his plan?

Was it to show off? I don't think so. Not when the result was a rebellious headache called *homo sapiens*. Not much glitz there.

Was it to cure loneliness? I don't think so. Not in a triune Family where there's infinite contentment and eternal joy. God didn't know the meaning of loneliness.

Was it to solve some kind of deficiency? Not when you already have everything that could ever be. God was perfect, lacking in nothing.

God's glory was infinite, his fellowship perfect, his heart filled to the brim.

He created human beings not because he lacked anything, but because he was so full and so delighted with his fullness that he wanted to share it with others.

What was he so full of?

He was full precisely of the capacity to empty who he was – all his attributes, all his resources – into others. He was a self-giving God and had been from all eternity – he was full of attribute of self-emptying love. The three members of his divine being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, had poured themselves entirely into each other forever.

It was a self-giving so intensely comforting, so abundantly replete with joy that God could not imagine restricting all of this immense delight to himself, but rather allowed it to burst out of the

bonds of his inner circle and fill the hearts of a new kind of creature made in his image. Precisely in the capacity also to pour himself into others. God was so self-giving that he poured his capacity to be self-giving into human beings, into us.

### **Our Calling in The Plan**

Here is The Plan at the heart of the universe.

You want to know something about the holiness of God? Sometimes we use that word and it just causes us trembles up and down our spines. It's an abstract word; and we don't quite know what holiness is. Well, it's the set-apartness of God. What sets God so far apart from everything else? It's this: his infinite capacity to pour his entire self into others. First, the triune members of his Family pour themselves into each other, and, then, in a different way, they pour themselves into those he makes to reflect his image, namely, human beings.

God is so full of the very best thing of all: the desire to pour himself out for the wellbeing of others. He then fashions us to do the same, pour ourselves out into others for their good.

Did you know that? Have you ever heard anything so wonderful? Why aren't more people talking about it? Why aren't more Christians talking about it?

You got the intelligentsia growling in their academic posts that human beings are nothing more than "chemical scum," according to Stephen Hawking. Albeit he admits we're rather magnificently evolved chemical scum, marvelously complex organisms, and yet quite randomly and accidentally so. Which means human existence has no inherent meaning or purpose.

And you got Christians swallowing their tongues and mumbling something under their breath about seven days of creation without the courage to stand up and announce the most important piece of biblical revelation: "Listen, world! Listen to the most thrilling message ever to fall on human ears. That we couldn't have a higher purpose as human beings. That we were made to fill the earth with the self-emptying image of God. That we were created to image in our relations with each other the glory of our Maker's capacity to pour himself out into others."

We couldn't have a higher calling. We couldn't have a more fulfilling vocation than the one given to us by God.

The Plan of God for us is to share in his glory by imaging his capacity to pour himself out for the good of others. It is unutterably wonderful.

So what happened? Humanity is not unutterably wonderful. Humanity is a mess.

What happened was a fall from God's intentions for us into the exact opposite of The Plan. Rather than become self-giving we are self-grasping. We took the fruit in order to glorify ourselves. We exchanged the glory of imaging God for the gloom and doom of idolizing ourselves. We did our own thing in our own way and for our own glory.

We made a mockery of God's plan! And, yet, that's not the whole of the truth. Because God's plan cannot be undermined by our plans, because God's plan actually accounts for our plans within its larger all-encompassing compass, there's more to God's plan than first meets the eye. The last time we were together we learned that there was an additional installment to God's plan, another step in implementing the plan by which he would subdue the earth by the unifying principle of the self-giving image of God.

And do you remember the identity of that step? He seeks to elect a new family, which would, in its interpersonal relations, image the self-emptying relations of the triune Family and thereby bless all other families. Abraham, *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Genesis 12:3). God chose, elected, a new family to accomplish his plan where the other families of the earth failed.

But that step would need to be accomplished in a novel way. Not only would God elect a new family to be his image bearers, but he would also provide a set of guidelines by which to insure that his image would be perfectly expressed by that family. He would provide rules, precepts, family guidelines to point the way to the proper expression of God's image. We call these rules 'the Law,' a law summed up by ten commandments.

### **The Law - A Set of Guidelines**

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the Ten Commandments, a list of rules which can be found in Exodus 20, is that they're all relational in nature. The first four deal with our relationship with God. The last six deal with our relationship with each other. The family rules for the family of God insure that his image will be expressed relationally in this world.

To repeat, the first four commandments deal with our relationship with God. *No other gods before me*. That's the first one. Secondly, there will be *no carved images of me*. In other words, I don't want you to make anything that will become an object of your worship, the sort of idolatry for which we humans have a disturbing penchant. Thirdly, there will be *no vain use of my name*. Fourthly, there will be *no neglect of one day in seven of worshipping me*. The last six deal with our relationships with each other. *Honoring our father and mother*. There will be *no murdering, no adulterating, no stealing, no slandering, no coveting*.

All these guidelines, think about them, are designed, first of all, to awaken in us the self-giving image of God, keeping our eyes riveted to the ultimately self-giving One (the first four commandments) and, secondly, to discourage self-grasping by forswearing all the temptations to take what doesn't belong to us (the last six commandments).

The Law, the Ten Commandments – they are formulated for the families of earth, representing a perfect set of guidelines by which to reflect in our human relations the relations of the holy triune Family. Can you imagine what would happen if we all adhered to the Ten Commandments? People and nations would have no problems; there would be no inter-relational conflict, no turmoil or division. If we just stuck to these ten rules. And, yet, remarkably, people want to take

down from the walls of courthouses across the land the only set of guidelines that guarantees domestic tranquility!

Well, we must not romanticize the Ten Commandments and suppose that the public display of these rules would automatically obliterate all inter-relational discord, as though printing up this set of guidelines on sticky paper and tacking them to every stop sign in the country would suddenly change people's behavior. It wouldn't. We would still be self-grasping at the core of our beings! It doesn't seem like the posting of simple rules would change what we innately are.

As the apostle Paul sums up – *None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes* (Romans 3:10-18).

This is a scathing critique of our ability as humans to abide by the set of guidelines established by God to promote families which image the self-giving glory of God. We just won't get it right. We won't kick the habit of compulsive self-grasping.

Maybe it's because the guidelines are too numerous. God didn't stop with the Ten Commandments. If you read all of Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the calculator will finally total over 600 statutes and rules and guidelines for the family of God. And the rules are all over the map, from providing amnesty to criminals in cities of refuge to prescribing isolation for women in menstruation. How can anybody track all these guidelines, let alone obey them? No wonder *none is righteous*. Not when the legal code is so complex!

It is at precisely this point the apostle Paul weighs in again and throws a big wrench into the seemingly reasonable objection that God has swamped us with too many rules. You aren't going to believe what he says, and it's something he says in two different places. He says that the whole law, all 600 plus guidelines, can be compressed into one word. In other words, he radically simplifies the OT Law. I know you may think it's impossible, to take something so complex and to distill it into one word.

### **The Law in One Word**

But it can be done, says Paul. Galatians 5:14 – *The whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

This does not mean to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself, thereby in a back-handed way condoning self-love. No it's so much more than that, indeed, so much more exciting. It's saying love your neighbor as though your neighbor were yourself. It's saying take up your neighbor's life and live it as though it were your life. Just like the Good Samaritan who picked up the person thrown into the ditch and carried him to a place of help. It's the story Jesus told the Pharisees when they asked, "What does it mean to love?" According to Jesus, it means to pick up the life of another and bear it as though it were your own life.

This is huge!

Or in a fuller rendition of the word love, listen to Romans 13:8 – *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Remarkable. The guidelines for God’s elected family, which is called to be a blessing to all the other families of the earth, are simple; they can be reduced to one word – Love!

In other words, this is what the law has been aiming at all along – Love.

You keep the law, you abide by the Ten Commandments, you observe all six hundred plus statutes – you will be able to do all of this only from a heart of love. Only a heart of love can be so selfless as to maintain all the commandments. And that’s The Plan. To form up in human beings hearts of love. It’s why I gave you the Law – to prove your love.

What is a heart of love? Isn’t it obvious?! Oh no, it isn’t! Love is the most misunderstood word in the English language.

We use the word ‘love’ for all sorts of things. It’s a slogan for peaceful co-existence. “All you need is love.” It’s slang for sexual intercourse. “Let’s make love.” It’s small talk for personal preference. “I love ice cream.”

How can we possibly know what is meant by a word susceptible to so many uses? In the Bible we find the origin of the term. We discover God himself using the word ‘love’ in a very profound and powerful way. He uses the word to sum up his plan for humanity. He uses the word to showcase his own self-emptying nature. To be our Maker is to LOVE! It is to pour himself out into others. That’s it. And by being made in his image, we human beings have been meant to love others, hence to pour ourselves out into others!

Hence one word says it all. LOVE! God is love. Love comes from God. It is his nature; it is his guideline for us.

*You’ve heard it from the beginning that you should love one another.* That’s what I said at the outset; and it’s what the whole law is about.

By this you will know love: when one lays down his life for another (John 15:13). In this, the love of God was manifested to us that God sent his only Son into the world to lay down his life for us. *Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another* (John 13:34). Lay down your life for others; that’s love (1 John 3-4). That’s my plan. That fulfills the law. If we’re all doing this, the world will see my glory.

Self-giving love. That's the calling card of the family of God and when the family of God follows that, fulfills that calling it becomes a spectacular blessing to all the families of the earth. How can it not? Such love renders the world fruitful. Because there are two things about such love.

### **Unfailing, Abiding Love**

First of all, *love never fails* (1 Corinthians 13:8). Not biblical love. Not God's love. You can't say that about anything else, can you? Everything else fails. But not love. It never fails to accomplish its work in a recipient. It's supernaturally strong. It's the most powerful shaping agent in the world.

Do you know what God says to husbands who love? He says if you love your wives as Christ loved the church when he gave himself up for her, your love will turn your wife into an unthinkably radiant wife; spotless and without blemish, holy and beautiful. Love your wife as Christ loved the church - by laying your life down for her, by picking up her life and making it your own. Live in her life instead of in your own and she will become somebody so beautiful everyone who looks at her will think of the glory of God. You can't imagine how beautiful she'll become because self-giving love is supernaturally powerful.

Love never fails. It transforms people.

Secondly, it never ends. It *abides* (1 Corinthians 13:13). It continues to work long after it is first expressed. It's the one thing you can do on earth that will last forever. Anyone want to leave a lasting legacy? Then reflect the self-giving love of God in your relations with others and you will start something that will never end. That's the way it was with Christ. Other things will fade away, die out, diminish over time. But the supernatural love of Christ just keeps on working.

Look at the love of Christ who gave his life for us once for all and yet the fruit of his radical self-sacrifice is making radical inroads in countless new lives daily. This is the ever-expanding work of the supernatural love of God.

Self-giving love. It never fails and it never ends. It just keeps going and going and going, blessing everything in its path.

Fill the world with an image of my self-emptying love, says the Lord, and my glory will fill the earth and heal the earth.

This is the one guideline I give to you: self-giving love. This is The Plan.

But there is a problem.

It is a guideline not strong enough to effect its purpose. You can tell people to love. You can tack up ten commandments on courthouse walls. You can scribble out 642 precepts. But you can't make people do them when they are predisposed to do the opposite.

We are not naturally self-giving. We are instead innately self-grasping. Something deep in our hearts pushes us away from the one thing we're called to be – a blessing to all the families of the earth. Sin keeps rearing its ugly head and spoiling everything. Until you can root self-grasping sin, encrusted to the linings of every heart, you're not going to improve this world.

Once again The Plan of God would seem to be thwarted. We are incapable of the love for which he made us and which reflects his image.

And, yet, God is not bamboozled by our failure. He knew that to effect his plan he'd need to do something to our hardened, calloused hearts. He knew he'd have to perform cardio-surgery. He knew he'd have to get into our hearts somehow and then do with us something to us that we cannot do for ourselves. He knew he'd need to change the disposition of our hearts.

If his plan is going to work, he will have to renovate our hearts. Perhaps the greatest promise in the Bible is the assurance that, one day, he will re-orient our hearts.

Look at Jeremiah 31:31 – *Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah [with the family I've elected to bless the rest of the families of the earth], not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt [on the day I gave them the guidelines, the Ten Commandments, good commandments, and yet not strong enough to effect in humans the purpose for which they were inscribed, so I'm going to come and perform a new covenant]. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it **on their hearts**.*

Yes, I'm going to tackle the root of the problem. I'm going to work within you. I'm going to change your human hearts. That's my prophecy and it's now been fulfilled. I'm going to write the law of love in your hearts. That's how I'm going to fulfill my plan! How's the Lord going to write his law of love in our hearts?

### **Embodied in One Person**

This is perhaps the most exciting revelation in the entire Bible.

Listen to Romans 8:2 – *The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by human flesh [a flesh which is inherently self-grasping and unable either to keep the law or be changed by the law] could not do.*

Praise God!

This human flesh, this heart of ours is not strong enough to express self-giving love. Especially not the infinite variety of self-giving love, like that of our self-giving God who we're supposed to be imaging. The law could not effect in us what it purposed.

However, God is strong enough to effect it.

Interestingly, the word here in Greek – where it says *for God **has done** what the law could not do* – the word for ‘has done’ is the word *dunamis*. It means ‘powerful,’ and may be translated: what we were not powerful enough to do, God has the power to do.

And how is God’s power expressed on our behalf?

Look again at Romans 8:3 – *By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.*

In other words, by sending Jesus to do what I’ve called you to do, which is to reflect my image, and he’s going to succeed at it even though he’s a human, even though he’s in the likeness of sinful flesh. He’s going to go all the way to the cross without once grasping for himself. And his victory over the sin of self-grasping is going to be imputed to us. *By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Pretty deep, isn’t it? Pretty wonderful too. He’s doing this **in** us. Jesus is fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law **in** us. He’s changing us **within**.

How?

By being the one who loved perfectly, who embodied the image of God fully, who gave himself up entirely – by being this one **within us**, so that it is *no longer I who live* (Galatians 2:20). Do you know what word represents the ‘I’ here in Greek? It’s the Greek pronoun *ego*. It is no longer *ego* who lives. For the first time for the rest of us humans, it is no longer the *ego* who lives. Prior to this it’s always been about me, about me getting what *ego* wants. *It is no longer the ego who lives, but Christ lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me* (Galatians 2:20).

The love by which Christ loved me is now in me because Christ who loves lives within me with his love (1 John 4:19). The love of God, because of the indwelling Jesus, is being perfected in me (1 John 4:12).

I’m no longer the man, I’m no longer the woman I used to be. All because, in Christ Jesus, God is executing his Plan.

No one has seen God at any time, but, when we love one another as he loves us, people see God. They see his image. They know we are his disciples by our love (John 13:35).

The Plan is not foiled by our lack of love, by hearts predisposition not to love. What we are naturally, self-grasping, God can change by his power. He changes our hearts by sending his own Son into our hearts, a Son who gave his life a ransom for many, who was perfectly self-giving even to the point of giving up his life on a cross. He changes our hearts by sending his Son to

inhabit us and renovate us according to his self-giving image. It is no longer the *ego* who lives but Christ Jesus who lives in us.

What a plan!

Is it being executed in you? Is this plan being performed right now in your hearts?

### **Hearts with Unceasing Anguish**

Or to put the question simply – Are you loving? Are you loving according to God’s definition of the term? Supernaturally loving, with a love that goes beyond what we are by nature. Are we becoming less and less self-grasping and more and more self-giving? Are people being blessed by your love? Is your love changing people around you? Is the love of Christ in you changing people?

It never fails to do so. Not Christ’s love in us. It never stops doing so. Not Christ’s love in us. Do you see your life impacting others?

As you appraise your life, this is the only question that really matters. Am I loving supernaturally, pouring my life into others for their good?

Don’t be surprised if it is precisely here that you feel your greatest failure as a Christian. You should. We are called to image a God who is infinitely loving!

But, also, don’t be surprised if this is where you experience your greatest victories. You should. The Lord Jesus Christ is living within you. He is supernaturally at work within you. He is making you more and more like him, more and more loving.

I know you are trying to grow in many ways. More knowledge, more income, more creativity, more renown. And all that’s all right. But here’s the point. All these other things are good only so far as they are brought into the service of love.

*If I have knowledge, but have not love, I am nothing* (1 Corinthians 13:2). Everything else in your life ought to be marshaled in the service of love. Money, popularity, homes, creativity. Am I using these things to love people?

Love’s the only thing that never fails and never ends.

Are you loving? The Bible is filled with examples of love. Bearing burdens, putting the interests of others ahead of your own (Philippians 2), helping brothers in material need (1 John 4). If you see a brother who has a need and you don’t do anything about it and you could do something about it, in what sense are you loving? There’s no self-giving there, you’re just holding on. You’re hoarding.

*Love in deed and in truth* (1 John 3:18). Lots of illustrations of love in the New Testament.

But let's go right for the jugular. The first manifestation of true biblical love is an *unceasing anguish in my heart* for those who are not part of God's family (Romans 9:2). This was the first evidence of God's love in you – loving the world so that it will not perish.

Do you have unceasing anguish of heart for the lost all around you? A loving person, a person in whom Christ's love dwells, does.

God so loved the world that he sent his own Son that none of us should perish but that all should have everlasting life. What kind of love is that? A God who is willing to send his Son to die? I tell you, I wouldn't give my son up for anybody. I'd give up myself, maybe, but not my son. God gave up his own Son to die so that we wouldn't perish, but believe in him and have eternal life. He did this because of his love, because of his unceasing anguish for the lost. I think I see far too little in me of the unceasing anguish of the heart of my Heavenly Father.

Several people have said to me, "Tim, as long as you're preaching this series about The Plan, we want to hear an illustration in each sermon about your father." All right, here we go.

This week we were able to clean out the rest of my parents' effects from their last home together. Finally! As I did the last walk-through of each room, something happened to me that I wasn't anticipating. I walked into the bedroom and found myself standing on the spot where my dad had dropped, where he breathed his last earthly breath. And suddenly I was overwhelmed by the thought that this is where it all ended. That amazing life . . . ended here. And I dropped to my knees in emotion, and felt once again a profound sense of loss.

I was thinking of all the things my dad has done over the course of eighty-five years. The people he'd touched, the businesses he'd been involved in, the countries he'd traveled to. A vast life that was so beautiful and so wonderful. It all came to an end right here.

And then something else happened to me that was completely involuntary. I was obviously quite emotional and the thought suddenly occurred to me - I don't know where it came from - what if your Dad had not been a child of God through Jesus Christ, saved for all eternity. I almost broke out in a cold sweat. Everything I treasure about my dad owes itself to the fact that he loved Jesus Christ and disciples me in the Lord. If that hadn't been the case, what would I do? A great darkness would descend upon my heart and it would be split open in agony. I just wouldn't be able to handle it.

There was an unceasing anguish in my heart for something that wasn't even the case. But the possibility of it was driving me mad. And then I thought, "If I could feel that way about my dad, for whom the hypothetical situation was not true, why don't I feel that way about so many others for whom it is so tragically true?"

I prayed on the spot that God would give me the same faith as my Dad, the same prayer life, the same unshakable spirit anchored in Christ . . . *and the same love for the lost.*

When I went into the home for the first time upon arriving on the scene everything was still in its place. I went up to the kitchen counter and there was a little four-by-eight notepad that Dad used to write notes to himself in very small letters. But this time he wrote in very big letters which meant it was not a note to himself, it was a note to those who might find it.

Perhaps sensing that his time was short, since he had been complaining about chest spasms, the note summed up his passion: “All for Jesus: till the whole world hears.” That’s what meant most to him and what he wanted us to find.

Make me more loving like my dad. Make me more like you, Heavenly, Holy, Awesome Father. Make me more loving like your Son Jesus Christ who gave his whole self in love for me. Make me far more loving, more prepared to pour my life into those who do not yet know about a Heavenly Father.

**[PRAYER]**

Oh Father, are we loving with the supernatural self-giving love of God that yearns especially for those who do not yet know Christ? Is there an anguish of heart for those whose hearts are hard as nails, dead as rocks, bleeding internally for eternity? Is it intolerable to us that they should not know your salvation? Awaken our love, Father. Awaken your love in us. Help us to come alive with Christ in love for others. We pray this, Father, in the name of Christ who alone can make us the kind of people for which we’re praying. We pray this for your glory, knowing you are glorified when we replicate your self-giving love.