



Mobilize Your Men to Meet the Pressing Needs in Your Church

Part II: How the Love of Christ Meets Pressing Needs in Your Church (Video Transcription)

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New Commandment Men's Ministries

Welcome back. Thank you so much for joining us for our second video in this series, "Mobilize Your Men to Meet the Needs Spectrum in Your Church." In our first session, we talked about what the needs spectrum is. We talked about emergency special project requests. We talked about long-term needs and catastrophic long-term needs.

Now what we want to do is examine the love of Christ. What does it really mean to practice the love of Christ? What we want to do is develop a way for the Church to express that love to widows, widowers and single parents.

What I recommend the church to do is to utilize their men. One of the main reasons why is because men are a very underutilized resources in the local church. And, as you're going to see, men absolutely love this ministry. If you don't have a men's ministry in your church, this is a fantastic way to begin a men's ministry. Or, if you already have a men's ministry in your church, because this is only once a month, you can plug this ministry in to your current men's ministry relatively easily.

Focus on Long Term Needs First

I want to begin by first stressing that we want to meet the long-term needs first. We want to teach them about the love of Christ and then we want to focus the attention of the men in our church on the needs of our widows and widowers and single parents.

Why do we want to focus on the needs of widows and single mothers? Why is that important? The reason is because the Word of God tells us it's important. I could easily list forty passage of Scripture that talk about God's heart for widows, God's heart for single parents, God's heart for fatherless children. But what I've done in your notes is to list just two, one classic passage from the New Testament and a classic passage from the Old Testament.

Let's first look at the New Testament.

James 1:27, "Pure religion and undefiled is this, to visit widows and orphans in their distress. And to keep oneself unspotted from this world."

What James is saying is that the highest expression of our faith - the purest expression of our religion - is to find a widow, to find an orphan, and visit them.

In ancient times, fatherless children were often considered to be the same as orphans. The reason was because widows had no means of support. In fact, a widow with a dependent child was in an even worse situation than a widow who was alone.

Therefore, James is saying that the purest form of our religion is to visit a widow or an orphan - or we could say, a single mom and her child, -in their distress, and to keep ourselves unspotted from this world.

That word "visit" is very important. In our culture the concept of visiting someone is very bland. We think of dropping by for coffee and donuts and saying hello and seeing how things are going. But in biblical times the concept of visiting someone was a very profound concept. The word that James is using means to come into a life and to bring about permanent change, either for good or for evil.

For example, God says, "I will visit the iniquity of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." Here's an example of God visiting someone and bringing about permanent change for evil. And let me tell you something, you don't want God visiting you that way!

An example of God visiting someone and bringing about permanent change for good is when God visits Abram and says, "Abram, at this time next year, Sarai your wife, will have son." Here God is bringing about permanent change for good.

So when James says in James 1:27, "Pure religion and undefiled is this, to visit a widow or an orphan in their distress," he's not talking about just dropping by and saying hello. He's talking about coming into their lives and bringing about permanent change for good. That's what it means.

And example of an Old Testament passage where we see God's heart for widows and single parents and fatherless children is Isaiah 1:17. God is talking to the nation of Israel and listing sin after sin. He is utterly disgusted with the entire nation. But in 1:17, He stops and says, "Wait a minute. Learn to do good." The He goes on in the verse and says, "Plead the cause of the orphan. Defend the case of the widow."

What does God mean, "Defend the case...plead the cause"? What He's talking about here is if the needs of the person you are looking at surpass your ability to meet those needs, don't just turn and walk away. Plead their cause! Find someone to help you help them. Find other resources.

For example, if I was in New York City down in the subway system and I was standing on the platform next to the tracks and next to me was someone who fell off the platform. And he weighed four hundred pounds. I would look at him and say, "I would love to help you. But you weigh too much. There's no way I could possibly help you."

What would you do? I know what I would do. I would start shouting, "Somebody help me help this person!" I would plead his cause. And that's what God is saying in Isaiah 1:17. When you see a widow. When you see a fatherless child and you think, "Oh man, they are so needy! And their needs are so great. There's nothing I can do to help them." Don't just turn and walk away. Plead their cause. Find other people to help you help them. Find other resources that are greater than your own limited resources to help them.

We have seen in the Word of God the reason why we want to focus the attention of our men on widows and single parents is because the Word of God commands us to. God's heart is bleeding for widows and widowers and single parents.

Train Your Men How to Practice the Love of Christ

Now we want to train our men to give the widowed and single parents what they need.

What do they need? They don't just need projects done for them. They need to be loved. And specifically, they need to be loved with the love of Jesus Christ. John 13:34-35, the New Commandment, where Jesus says, "A new commandment I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Several years ago I was studying this passage. I was preparing a sermon on it. And I came to that last phrase: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," and I thought, "O, Jesus is saying that his love is unique. In fact, he's saying that it's so unique, when non-Christians see us loving like him, they will immediately identify us as his followers."

Then it dawned on me, "That means that God has hard-wired the entire human race to be able to recognize when they are in the presence of love of Christ." And then I sat back in my chair and a question struck me that changed my life, "If Christ's love is so unique, so different, that when we love the way Christ has loved us people recognize us as his followers, what is it that makes it different?"

At that moment I realized that I didn't know the answer to that question. I did not know what makes Christ's love unique. So I decided that I would spend an entire year meditating and thinking and praying and studying that question. And I did. I spent hours thinking about what makes Christ's love unique. I talked about it with friends. I prayed about it.

And after a year of meditating on this topic, I concluded that there are at least three unique qualities of Christ's love, so that when we practice these qualities, people immediately identify us as followers of Jesus Christ.

What I want to do is talk about these three unique qualities of Christ's love. And it just so happens that these three unique qualities of Christ's love are exactly what the widowed and single parents need to have from the church. So I want to talk about how these qualities apply to the widowed and single parents.

The first two qualities are based on a key doctrine of our faith, the Incarnation. The third quality is based on a second key doctrine of our faith, and that's redemption. I want to talk about his first quality as it relates to the Incarnation, and that first quality I call "personal identification."

Personal Identification

Prior to the birth of Christ God communicated to the human race in all kinds of ways. He communicated to us through dreams, through prophets, through miracles. He communicated through a burning bush. He communicated through a donkey. All kinds of ways. But suddenly, in the Incarnation, God is communicating in a way that he never had before. In the Incarnation, God personally identifies with us. He comes into our life and he lives our life exactly the way we live our lives. He's born the way we are born. He has parents. He has brothers and sisters. He grows up. He had to learn. He got tired. He got

sweaty. He got dirty. He got into arguments with his brothers. He got into arguments with his parents. He lived life the way we live life.

And then in his ministry, he identifies with people even more. He ate with prostitutes and sinners. It was scandalous the way Christ identified with people. When he saw the leper, he didn't just say, "Be healed." Remember what he did? He put his hand on the leper's head. When he saw Zacchaeus in the tree, he didn't just say, "Hey, Zacchaeus, come down here. I want to talk to you." What did he say? He said, "Zacchaeus, come down here, *for today I must eat in your home.*"

And I'm sure when he said that, the entire crowd around him gasped because Zacchaeus was a publican and Jesus invited himself over for lunch. Jesus wouldn't just settle for talking with him on the road. He said, "I've got to go visit you in your home."

Jesus identified with us on every single level, so much so that he even identified with us in death. He knows what it's like to die. And so Hebrews says we now have a high priest who knows our infirmities. He knows what it's like to be a weak human being who struggles with a depraved world.

And not only is there this increased awareness and understanding on God's part, but there's this increased awareness and understanding on our part. John says in 1 John 3:16, "By this perceive we the love of God, that he laid down his life for us."

And John says in John 1:10, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

And so as a result of the Incarnation, we understand God in a way that we never could have before. We understand his glory. We see his love to the extent that he gave his son and his son dies for us on the cross.

And so the result, then, of personal identification is increased communication and understanding. And Jesus says, "That's how I have loved you. And now I'm commanding you to love each other the same way." So if we're going to love a widow or widower, or single mom or single dad, the way Christ has loved us, then the first thing we need to do is personally identify with them.

This is why we take a team of men and we assign them to that widow or that single mom and they begin to serve her on a regular basis for two hours once a month, normally from 8 to 10 on a Saturday morning, and they begin to get to know that person.

One of the things I love to do is take a team for the first time and introduce them for the first time to this person they are going to be serving literally for years. And one time I took a team to a woman's home, her name was Ila. After we worked around her home for about an hour or so, we had some extra time. We were standing in her living room, and on her wall were pictures of people, obviously family members. I said, "Ila, who is this little baby up here?"

She said, "That baby is from my first marriage. I was married at a very young age and my husband was in a car accident. He suffered total amnesia. Didn't know who I was. He had a complete personality change. So we divorced. And then that baby wound up dying of SIDS."

"Then this second child up here is from my second marriage. I married on the rebound. It didn't last very long. I was only married a year and then we divorced. I've been divorced now for twenty-five years."

Then she said, "This picture down here is a teenage boy who is my nephew. He's on trial for murder this week. And this teenage boy next to him was killed in a drive by shooting."

By now we all were getting really depressed. She said, "You know what, I've got some other pictures I want to show you."

She took us into her bedroom and there on her wall, up above her headboard, were these pictures of people from India. I said, "Ila, who are these people?"

She said, "These are pictures of people that I've led to the Lord in India."

"Really?"

"Yes. Every summer for my vacation, I and some friends of mine go to India. And we just go randomly door to door and witness. Over the years we've been able to lead 4,000 people to Christ!"

I looked out of the corner of my eye and I could see the other guys starting to weep. Guys don't like to cry, especially in front of other guys. So I quickly said, "Hey, let's go out into the living room and pray."

We walked out into the living room, stood around and prayed. Afterwards, one of the men pulled me aside and said, "Pastor, I've been going to church with Ila all these years, and I never knew any of this."

Men, you go to church, you see that widow. You see that single mom. And if you're lucky, you know her name, right? But you don't really know her, do you? That widow needs to know that there's somebody in her church who knows her, who understands her. She needs people who not only know her problems, they know why she has those problems. That's what is going to happen in this ministry. We're going to have men begin to really understand their care receivers the way God understands us.

The first unique quality of Christ's love, then, is personal identification, where we come to know and understand the person we're ministering to.

Commitment

The second unique quality of Christ's love is also based on the doctrine of the Incarnation and it's what I call commitment.

I used to think when I was a kid that when Jesus ascended into heaven he stopped being a human being. That's not what our church believed. I just misunderstood. But that's not true. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he didn't stop being a human being. Did you know that? He's still a human being. He's a human being in his glorified state. He is God very God and man very man. And John says in 1 John, when we see him, we're going to be like him for we shall see him just as he is.

Isn't that amazing? We're going to see the nail scars in his hands. We're going to see the sword scar in his side. We're going to be like him because he's the first born among many brethren. Jesus has started an entire new human race. And he's is the head of that race. At one point he was God and then he became a man. And now he is God, and always will be God, and he always will be a man.

There will never again be a time when he is not a part of humanity. Isn't that amazing? In other words, the Incarnation was not just a short-term mission trip for Jesus. I've been on mission trips where it gets a little tiring sometimes and I think, "I can't wait to get back to the States."

That was not the case with Jesus. It wasn't like after 33 and a half years he thought, "Finally, I'm done with these people. I can go back to heaven and be done with them!" No! Jesus became a human being. And he always will be a human being. He will never turn his back on us. Why? Because "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

Jesus says, "That's how I have loved you. And now I'm commanding you to love each other the same way."

Therefore, if we're going to love a widow or single mom the way Christ has loved us, not only are we going to need to identify with them, we are also going to need to commit to them. That's why we take a team of men, we go to that widow or single mom, and we say to them, "By the grace of God, we are going to provide a team of men for you *for as long as you need one.*"

Now we're not saying that they're going to have the same men on the team forever. One of the reasons why we use teams is that we know there's going to be attrition. Maybe after five or ten years the team only has two original men and two new men have come onto the team. Or maybe there are completely new men on the team. But the church is still demonstrating commitment: consistent and effective ministry over years, and in some cases now more than ten years.

The reason why we do this is because we want to show commitment to that widow the way God has shown commitment to us.

Now I know what some of you are thinking, "We have some young widows in our church, maybe in their thirties or forties. You're saying, we're going to provide a team for them for as long as they need one? That could be thirty or forty years or longer. How can we possibly make that kind of commitment?"

My answer is that churches make that kind of commitment all the time. Only usually it's in the form of a mortgage to a bank. Right? I know my church at one time had a mortgage of over a million dollars that we owed our bank. Perhaps some of us personally have thirty year mortgages that we owe to banks. If we can make that kind of commitment to a bank for a building, then why can't we make that kind of commitment to a widow, or to a single mom? Isn't the least widow in your church far more valuable than any building any church could ever build?

We go to that widow, then, and we say to her, "By the grace of God, for as long as you need a team, we will provide one for you." I can't tell you what that means for a widow to hear that from her church and then to experience commitment from her church in obedience to the covenant that Christ has made with us. We are members of a covenant and we are to be committed to each other.

I didn't understand what this meant for a single mom or widow until I had this experience. Our men's ministry was meeting for their bible study and prayer time at a McDonalds. It was kind of funny because we met in the playground area. Here were all these adult men sitting around in kiddie chairs. After several months of doing this, one of the ladies behind the counter couldn't contain herself anymore and said to me, "Who are you guys and what are you doing?"

When I told her, she said (her name was Cindy), "Well, I'm a single mom and I have four children. And I'm all alone. And it's hard. Could you provide a team for me?" And I said yes, we'd be happy to.

The next month we got a team together for Cindy, and after our prayer and bible study time at McDonalds, we went over to her home and she cooked us an Hispanic breakfast. We sat around her table in her kitchen and got to know Cindy. I'll never forget that. It was like the Spirit of God had descended on that kitchen.

Then after we finished eating her breakfast, we got up and we served her. We fixed her dryer and then went outside and trimmed her bushes. One of the guys saw that she had a Nissan Quest van with bald tires on it. He told her he was a mechanic and could get her some good used tires on her van. She said yes, so he took the van, got some tires and put them on the van.

By the time he got back, she had to leave so she could be back at work at McDonalds. So all the guys piled into the van and drove it over there to give her the keys.

She came out into the parking lot and as she reached to get the keys, the men said to her something that changed what they had done from a mere project into the love of Christ.

“Cindy, what would you like us to do for you next month?”

She said, “Next month?”

They said, “Yeah, next month.”

“You’re coming back next month?”

They said, “Well, if you’d like us to.”

She said, “How long will you come back?”

“Cindy, we’ll come back as long as you need us to,” they responded.

She immediately began weeping uncontrollably. She couldn’t talk, so she just took the keys in her hand, turned around and walked back into the McDonalds, weeping the entire way.

And the next morning, Cindy Lopez showed up in church.

When the team told me this story, I said to them, “You could have been handing out gospel tracts all day long at that McDonalds and not had the impact that Cindy had when she explained to her fellow workers why she was crying.”

You see, that’s commitment. It’s going to that widow, it’s going to that single mom, and telling them, “By the grace of God, we will never turn our back on you. Love never fails. And we’re not going to fail you.” And that’s what a widow or single mom needs to hear from the church.

So the first two unique qualities of Christ’s love are personal identification and commitment. They are based on the doctrine of the Incarnation. But the third unique quality of Christ’s love is based on a different doctrine. It’s the doctrine of redemption.

Sacrifice

The third unique quality is what we call sacrifice. This is normally what we think of when we think of the love of Christ, isn’t it? Sacrifice.

In redemption, God is paying a penalty that we could not pay. God is paying a price and that price was death. The wages of sin is death and we could only pay that by dying. But God, under no obligation on his part, sent his son to die in our place and for our stead and bear the penalty for our sin on the cross. And God says, “If you will acknowledge that you are a sinner and place your faith and trust in my provision for

your sin - my son, Jesus Christ and his death on the cross for your sin - I will forgive your sin and I will make you my child."

If you are reading this right now and you have never done that, then my invitation to you is to tell God in your heart, "God I know I am a sinner. And right now I accept Jesus Christ as the one who died for me on the cross."

The Bible says the moment you do that you pass from death to life.

Now the Bible says the death of Christ is redemptive. And that's true. But the Bible also says that the death of Christ is not *just* redemptive. The Bible also says that the death of Christ is *exemplary*. Again, 1 John 3:16, "By this perceive we the love of Christ, that he laid down his life for us. *And we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren.*"

Wow! God says, this is how I have loved you. And now I want you to love each other the same way. So if we're going to love a widow or widower, or single mom or single dad the way Christ has loved us, then not only are we going to need to personally identify with them, not only are we going to need to commit to them, but we are also going to need to sacrifice for them.

Therefore, we go to that widow or single mom and we say to them, "If there is a need in your life that you cannot meet, then by the grace of God, we will find a way to meet that need." Now we're not saying, "We're going to meet your every need." That's not what we're saying. That would be communism: "You can quit your job! Because we're going to meet everything for you." That's not what we're saying. In fact, if that widow or single mom can meet all their needs, then that's wonderful. We'll go on to somebody else.

But we know from experience, and the Bible clearly tells us, that there are people in our congregations who have needs that they cannot meet. And to those people we say, "If there is a need in your life that you cannot meet, we will find a way to meet that need."

Now what does this look like in practice? We've got a team of four men showing up at a widow's door once a month for two hours to do whatever needs to be done. What exactly do we mean by sacrifice here?

Think in terms of five or ten bucks a month. That'd be twenty to forty dollars per team. Most of the projects you're going to be doing aren't going to cost anything. You're going to be raking leaves, cleaning gutters, or cleaning windows - whatever the case may be.

Every now and then, though, there are going to be things that will require some money. If the widow or single mom has the money, then of course they should pay for the materials that are required. But let's say they don't. Let's say there's a water faucet that needs to be repaired. So you run to The Home Depot and you get the parts, come back, and fix the water faucet. You split up the cost, twenty to forty bucks, you can do a lot of projects with that kind of money.

But what happens if the need exceeds that? What does the Word of God tell us to do in Isaiah 1:17? Plead the cause. What does that mean? It means if your resources are not great enough to meet the need, then you find other people and other resources who can help you meet that need: you plead the cause.

The purpose of the team at that point, then, is to plead the cause. Let's say the widow's heat has gone out and it's going to cost \$3,000 to replace the central heating unit. And it's ten degrees outside, which happens here in Denver, and the widow's staying in a motel. She can't stay there forever, so you've got to do something. What do you do?

The first thing you do is contact her relatives, maybe in this case her adult son. You tell him his mom's heat's gone out and it's going to cost \$3,000 to replace the central heating unit. You ask him if he can help. And it doesn't hurt to remind him that it's been a year since he's been by to see his mom!

Or, if her relatives don't pan out, you go online and you start researching charities, or maybe government resources. Maybe none of that pans out, then what do you do? Well, then you go to the church and explain Helen's situation to the benevolence committee.

Someone says, "What if Helen has a need for a heart/lung transplant and it's going to cost \$300,000? Then what do you do? Then you go to multiple churches. The Apostle Paul went to churches on multiple continents on behalf of the needs of believers in Jerusalem.

The point is, you never stop. You never stop advocating for your care receiver. I have been doing this for twenty years, five years as a pastor in my own church, and now for almost fifteen years helping hundreds of churches develop men's team ministries all over the country and all over the world. I have yet to hear of a single need going unmet. It's amazing.

Remember the story about Ila and her taking friends to India and leading 4,000 people to Christ? She had a basement that was not finished and she was also struggling financially. She had saved up for many years to buy this little home. She was an office manager and wasn't making a lot of money. She was running about \$200 short a month in her budget. She had some savings, but she was whittling it down every month and her team found out about it.

They went to her and said, "You know, Ila, we could put a rental unit in your basement if you'd like. If you can cover the cost of the material, we'll provide the labor." She told them to do it and they did! They put in a living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom. It took them eighteen months, but they did. She could rent it out for \$550 a month and that solved her financial problem.

At one point my team was assigned to a widow and single mom. The reason why she was a widow and single mom was because her son murdered her husband. This was all over the news here in Denver. But what was not in the news was that she herself was also dying. She was in the hospital with liver disease. She had already had one liver transplant. Her body was rejecting it and she needed a live liver donor.

With liver transplants, someone donates half of a healthy liver. The half they keep grows back into a liver and the half they donate grows into a liver as well. She needed one of those liver transplants. So I sent out an email to men in our church that were involved in our men's team ministry. We had about fifty guys at the time involved in it. I just said, "Chris is dying of liver disease. She needs a live liver donor." I gave them her blood type and asked if there was anyone with that blood type who would be interested in donating their liver.

I was shocked. We had two men volunteer to be live liver donors for Chris. As it turned out, she wound up receiving a liver from a cadaver. She's doing well now. She's healthy. She has remarried and doing very

well. But that's what we need. That's what the word of God means when it says, "By this perceive we the love of God, when he laid down his life for us. *And we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren.*"

Let me tell you, men, the love of Christ is not for sissies. When we go to that widow, when we go to that single mom, we are guaranteeing their wellbeing. We are saying, "If there is a need that you have that you can't meet, then we are going to find a way to meet that need."

These, then, are the three unique qualities of Christ's love: personal identification - we come to know and understand someone in the context of their life; commitment - never walking away from them; and sacrifice, finding ways to meet any need they cannot meet.

I believe that when those three qualities are present, that we can say, "Yes, we are loving this person the way Christ has commanded us to love them." And when you train men this way in the love of Christ, you are giving them something very powerful because they can identify exactly when they are doing what Jesus Christ commanded them to do. And that's why men become so passionate about this ministry.

The only thing we need to do now is to give our men a practical way to express this love. And that's what we're going to talk about in our third video on the men's team ministry model. We're going to give you a very simple, practical model to express these three qualities – personal identification, commitment and sacrifice. You're going to really enjoy this upcoming third video because it's so practical and so simple.

Until then, thank you for joining us and we'll see you next time.