

We are commanded to love: How?

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Abstract

There are many issues that we are dealing with as a society today which are the same across the globe. Many such as poverty, lack of education, poor behaviour, and violence are a direct result of generational trauma that is passed on. As a society and governments, we often assess our social problems in monetary terms or through addressing physical needs. We address these problems with short-term solutions that do not address the root cause underlying why people find themselves in these situations. The pillars that society is founded on are trust, cooperation, and working together. These qualities stem directly from caring for one another as a society or – putting it another way – love for each other. For many years generational and inherited trauma has been passed down and, as a society, we have developed coping mechanisms to deal with our issues without actually working through our trauma, perpetuating the cycle. As a society, we opt to throw money at problems instead of putting in the hard work to fix our broken societal contracts. This article will examine case studies of systemic policies re-entrenching the same behaviours and how policies based around providing people with the tools to communicate and learn to love one another will go a long way to healing the structural deficiencies found in the current social structure.

Introduction

As Christians, we are commanded to love, but there is little substantive teaching on practical steps on how to constructively love our neighbour. A true understanding of the power of love can only be obtained when love is absent. Examples exist in most countries, but perhaps more so in Africa. Trauma is a major cause of dysfunctional parenting. Educating parents on how their

behaviour influences children is the first solid step the church can take in helping to ease the suffering felt by much of society. Behaviour needs to change, and this is only possible with human contact and love, from people with skills who are willing to give time to the less fortunate. The second step is to set in place a healing (restorative) programme. Mentalising, as in thinking about thinking, is an ancient proven technique that can be used by laypeople.

To grasp the significance of the command to love our neighbour we must answer three questions about the command - why, how, and whom? To answer these questions, it is necessary to combine the instructions from two areas of the Bible. Jesus quoted two verses from different books of the Bible. The first is from Deuteronomy 6:5 which states, 'You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.' (The New Jerusalem Bible, 1985) . These are the words of Moses before the people of Israel entered the promised land. It was his primary command, and he talked of both our ancestors and generations to come. The focus is on loving God first and from that state all else will come. The gifts they were to receive are gifts from God and they must always remember and behave accordingly. Gratitude positively influences behaviour.

The second verse we need to consider is Leviticus 19:18 which states, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (The New Jerusalem Bible, 1985). These are the words of God given to Moses for the slaves that had escaped Egypt. They were a group of people living in a legal and social vacuum. The norms of their lives had been removed and God was providing structure for their lives, like a good parent provides children. They would have been impulsive, been risk-takers, had minimal social skills, had limited intellectual ability, and suffered from disease. The command to love your neighbour neatly addresses the lack of social skills; the intention is to change behaviour. Both passages were equipping/preparing people for a new life, one contrastingly different from their previous or present life.

The third passage to consider when understanding the command to love our neighbour is the parable of the good Samaritan. The message is very clear and precise: help those in need in a practical way. Christianity, over the centuries, has repeatedly deviated from the path that I imagine Jesus would have desired, isolating from the ordinary men and women of the world for a variety of

reasons. Falling attendance in most Western countries is perhaps an indication of another deviation. We can follow and worship Christ as much as we like, but if we fail to obey his commands to love we are lost. To delve deeper into the complexity of this command to love, it is necessary to investigate human behaviour. Let us consider a survey of young adults in the Cape Metro.

Paradox of civilisation

Measuring problems

Imagine a middle-class suburb, with wide meandering roads, green lawns, substantial, well-maintained houses, clean shiny cars parked outside, and few people visible. Then if you walked across the road or railway line you would observe the camp-type setup. There are very few roads and no lawns. Every space is filled with a dwelling of some sort. There are formally constructed buildings, but each is surrounded by shacks: corrugated structures that have been erected to keep most of the weather out. There are cars but many are permanently parked, rusting mementos of the past. In addition, there are people: people everywhere busy doing something or going somewhere.

The above scenario juxtaposing rich and poor makes society uncomfortable, so academics are sent in to measure income. Society is obsessed with money, and it is an easy and concise way to measure things, so these academics produce an income per household, family, or individual depending on their preference. Then the statisticians sift, juggle, and sort these figures to produce a poverty line. Below the line, people have inadequate resources for living and, above the line, they are deemed as okay. From this information, it is obvious to everybody that the problem, for the people living across the road or railway line, is a lack of resources. Hence, the women of the church collect blankets in winter so the people in need are warm. Others organise a soup kitchen so the people in need are not hungry. This generous giving generates a sense of worth in the givers; they are solving a problem. People are no longer cold or hungry. This altruistic behaviour permeates the government and they provide grants, subsidies, free education, health, and, for a lucky few, houses. The list grows every year as people think up new needs. This all flows from defining, understanding, and measuring poverty in monetary terms.

Alas, the practice and policy of handouts appear to make no difference to poverty. Poverty comes and goes with economic prosperity. The history books talk about poverty; in South Africa poverty is worse now than it was pre-democracy; it appears to be a perennial problem. Even economically rich countries like the United States of America have a poverty problem. New Zealand and Singapore are also no strangers to this issue. The yardstick by which poverty is measured is different in each country but it is still a reality when different populations or communities are compared. Certainly, the gifts and handouts make life more comfortable for the recipients, and at times and in places the soup kitchens are needed so people don't die of malnutrition. These gifts are not inherently bad or wrong but it is necessary to accept that while they solve an immediate problem the deep-seated issues remain. The conclusion must be that gifts and handouts do not solve the poverty or inequality problem. It is time to go back to these contrasting communities and look again. The pillars of social order need to be examined.

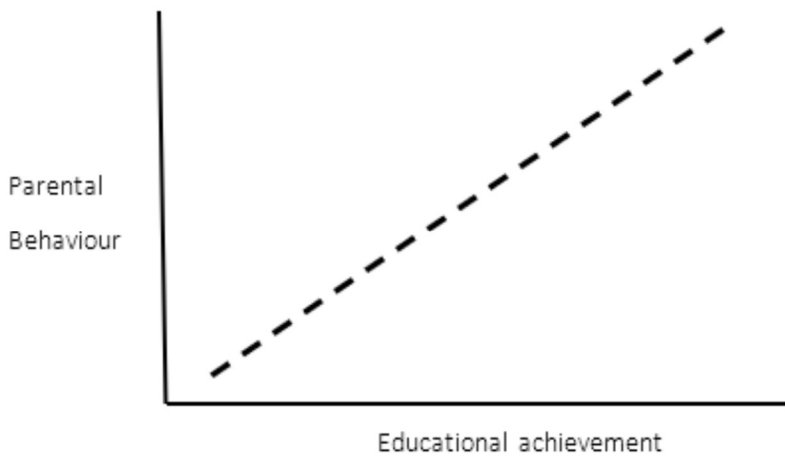
Everybody has problems or challenges to face in life and I suspect the two communities described above also have different challenges. I also surmise that both communities have similar aspirations; they both may want their children to succeed in life. Despite the challenges of the disadvantaged community, their children are as clean and sparkling when they head off to school in the morning as the children in the privileged community. I suspect there are more similarities between these two communities than the media or casual observer might suggest. Both communities are made up of people; there is a common ancestry; there are common needs; and we are all born, live, and die. To move beyond a simplistic economic evaluation or one of 'I suspect', a comprehensive survey is a useful tool.

Longitudinal survey of young adults

One such survey was done in the Cape Metropolitan area between 2002 and 2009 (Lam et al. 2012). The comprehensive survey was done with young adults starting between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. There were five waves of questions put to the participants and, initially, there were five thousand participants. In total, there were around five thousand questions about parents, education, substance use, sex life, attitude to school, home stability, homework, race, religion, and many more. It was aimed at the interface between one generation and the next, so important for the transfer or

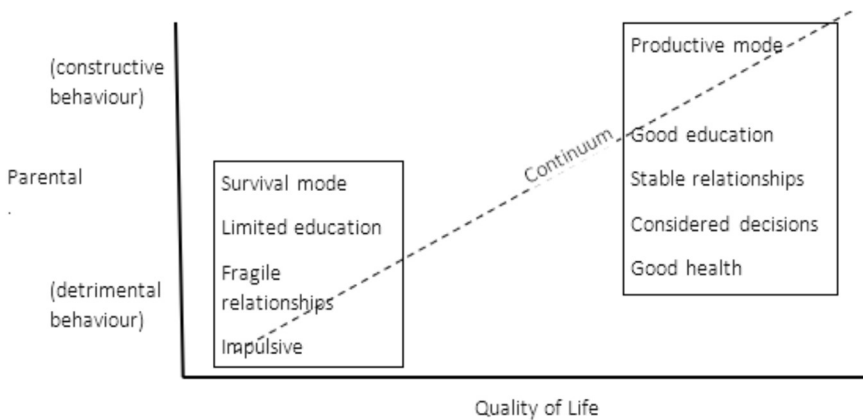
perpetuation of culture, skills, and knowledge. In the first wave of questions, there were many directed at parents. The analysis presented below is a multivariate regression using least squares (a statistical method of finding the line of best fit) and the importance of each factor was estimated by running the model repeatedly excluding one significant factor at a time (Smaill 2017). The analysis was done to determine what factors are important in predicting educational achievement. The two thousand young adults who completed all the relevant questions were used to produce the model.

Figure 1: Multivariate regression analysis



One of the rules of statistics is that correlations don't prove causality, but other research provides corroborating evidence. A good education is generally accepted as something that results in a good job and a reasonable income or a pleasing quality of life. Behaviour is on the other axis and could be interpreted as love expressed either positively or negatively.

Figure 2: Interpreted multivariant regression analysis



Significance of analysis

Despite expectations, wealth was a minor factor in the model; it contributed little to the variation explained. Various types of behaviour dominated the model. This is contra to popular thinking and practice. It is parental behaviour that determines the future of their children and therefore the destiny of society. This confirms the previous concept that gifts do not change behaviour. One of the realities of life is that you need to invest in yourself, build skills, and so eventually reap the rewards. You need to work for rewards. Handouts erode this truth of life. Why work when someone else will give you what you need? There are good arguments for handouts like education but, even with education, parents should pay something. They then place value on education and want to get value for their money; they become actively involved with their child's education and that is beneficial. Even R10 a month will do it. Healthcare is another example. Everybody benefits when people can work.

Another unexpected result of the research was that race was a non-significant factor. Being black or white was neither an advantage nor a disadvantage when it came to education. This dismisses all the propaganda of the apartheid era that polluted so many minds. White people are not superior nor are black

people inferior. We are all the same under the skin. It also makes the current racial legislation in South Africa that advances one race over another irrational. Experience in South Africa has shown that when one race is given precedence it is only a minority of that race who are advantaged, while the majority of that race are disadvantaged. Unemployment is at an all-time high; the individuals who create jobs are discouraged for many reasons. When people are rewarded or selected for their race or other reasons and not their ability, it puts the economy into a wobble and therefore also job creation. Rewarding ability is good for the individual and the economy. When people work together for a shared dream either at home, at work, or at a national level magic happens, and objectives are achieved. A divided society is usually corrupt and its social objectives elusive.

One unpublished result of the analysis was that religion was a non-significant variable. Being raised by Christian parents gives no advantage to children; the principles of love have not permeated to parenting. This indicates a need for Christian leaders to consider remedial action.

The research demonstrates that effort and love bring rewards. Love is not some soft feminine thing. It is hard-core; it produces results and, without love, society and prosperity decline.

Slaves of Egypt

The Jewish slaves that escaped from Egypt can be compared with people in the Cape Metro living in survival mode. Both groups had parents who were traumatised and had no understanding of how their behaviour/example influenced their children's lives. The slaves had crossed the Red Sea but they were living their lives in a legal and social vacuum. The norms of their lives had been removed and God was providing structure for their lives, like a good parent provides children. The chapters around Leviticus 19 are instructions from God that parents would normally teach their children indicating that normal parenting had not occurred. This is expected behaviour in a community of deprived people. They would have been impulsive, been risk-takers, had minimal social skills, had limited intellectual ability, and suffered from disease. Christ's command to love your neighbour neatly addresses the lack of social skills but it also references all the other practical laws found around that chapter in Leviticus. His audience would have known those passages.

The implication for those of us living in Cape Town, or any Christian around the world living in proximity to a deprived community, is that we should be imparting practical knowledge to these people just as God did for the slaves. We can help them process their trauma and explain how constructive parental behaviour improves life for their children. Many Christians would argue that we must just save them and everything else will just happen miraculously from within. This was not the methodology that God used. When we find a man with a broken arm it is obvious that we must take him to hospital. Why is a man with limited parenting knowledge any different; why is a traumatised man any different; and why is a couple with marriage problems any different? They all need practical help and Jesus commanded us to give it. A broken arm is a minor short-term problem whereas the others all have implications for the next generation. The greatest tool we have to address these problems is love. This is because love is a powerful tool that should infuse every relationship. So whom should we love? It is our selves and families and friends, but most especially the disadvantaged communities of our city or town and perhaps every individual whom we interact with or with whom we have a relationship. So how do we develop this capacity for love? What tools do we have as individuals and communities to love and through love start to heal the issues that we collectively suffer from? We need to start with ourselves, our relationship with God, and those closest to us.

How to love on a personal level?

Personal interactive love can be defined in very practical terms. It is behaviour that enhances relationships and needs to be applied appropriately depending on the particular relationship. A car salesman is different from your life partner, a baby, or a teenager. Nevertheless, you have a relationship with each and the success or productivity of that relationship depends on your behaviour. Love behaviours include:

Eye contact

Eye contact conveys honesty and interest. If the car salesman does not make eye contact you walk away. When a woman turns to face a man and makes eye contact, she is expressing her interest in him. When you talk to a baby, they turn towards you and make eye contact; this is the first and vital step in communication. The physical characteristics of the human eye make it easy to

determine the focus of attention of the other. A courting couple will gaze into each other's eyes; it's part of the bonding process and integral in bond maintenance. In some cultures, children making eye contact with adults is considered disrespectful, a practice that erodes attachment. Eye contact is important.

Interactive talking

This does not include instructions or condemnation but rather a free exchange of ideas without judgment or criticism. Ideas and experiences are shared willingly and openly with one another because they enhance our lives and others. We need to share what is happening in our minds and the more intimate the relationship the more we need to share to maintain that verbal intimacy. It is the little things that matter. Your child comes home from school with his first project and he is so excited to share the details with you. You make a silly mistake and you share the details with your partner - you both laugh. A little spice was added to the meat dish; the compliments around the table were complimentary and encouraging. Many people talk to their pets as if they were human; such is our need to communicate. Often people living alone can't stop talking when they are in company to the point that they forget that other people also need to express themselves. Talking is a universal need and a common denominator like food. Sitting around a table to share food and ideas is an important behaviour, particularly so for families. Children need to learn to express their ideas and opinions with adults but also to take their turn and listen respectfully to others. Parents that are dominant or authoritarian inhibit this learning opportunity. We all need to chat.

Active listening

This is an attribute that many neglect or forget. This is actively listening to the other without interruption or suggestions. A partner needs to let off steam or their frustrations from work but does not need advice on how to solve their work problems; they are dealing with them in their way. People need to tell their stories; it helps them to process the associated emotions. Bottled-up emotions are toxic and talking about them allows them to be processed and filed. Allowing people to talk freely is essential for their mental health. Listening is mostly more important than talking.

Messages of affirmation

Messages of affirmation are conveyed using words, deeds, or gifts. These are messages of love and people have preferences for how the message is conveyed. For some, words are the ultimate, for others it might be doing a chore not normally expected of them, and, lastly, for some it is a gift. For children, a gift is usually a winner. Food is a universally accepted gift especially if someone is affronted. The food preparation is an act of love, a behaviour, and it fills a real need for the recipient and the giver. We need to be told continually that we are loved and, no matter how it is done, it needs to be done. Pets show their unconditional love, dogs more consistently than cats.

Touch appropriate to the relationship

A baby needs lots of touch and affection for normal development. For a couple, sex is the ultimate touching but the hugs and kisses during the day are equally important. With the car salesman, a handshake is appropriate. For friends and relatives, hugs are normal but doing it excessively would be inappropriate. Social norms are the guidelines for touch and stepping outside those is risky. With strangers of the opposite sex, standing too close is inappropriate unless there is no alternative. A sexless marriage will fail and a baby without affection is doomed. Touch is essential but it needs to be in the correct circumstances.

Emotional interdependence

Emotional interdependence means spending time with a significant other. If a man spends an hour or two in the pub every night after work, his emotional interdependence is with his pub mates. Alternatively, if a woman needs to spend an hour every day chatting with her mother, her emotional interdependence will be with her mother. Partners need to make time and spend it with each other. We need to supply the emotional needs of the other, listen to their concerns, and respond accordingly. If being with your dating partner does not fulfil your emotional needs then it's time to break up. If your life partner does not fulfil your emotional needs, it's time to talk. Parents need to spend quality time with their children. Your time with them tells them that they are important. An emotional connection is important but it needs to be with the right people.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a necessary part of relationships. Mistakes are a normal part of life so others need to be forgiven. Boundaries are an important part of life and we need to define our own and convey that to our partner. Setting boundaries is a part of growing up and life without boundaries will cause problems in the relationships of young adults. Often the offender is not even aware of their error. When a person holds a grudge, it tends to poison all their relationships. They become bitter and resentful, pulling away from other relationships. They are more critical and judgemental of all people. My wife was killed in an accident and I forgave the other driver because I knew pent-up anger and hate would undermine my ability to provide the care and love my children would need from me.

Love summary

All the above behaviours stimulate the release of hormones so that you feel good about yourself and the other. These hormones are the oil of relationships; they reduce friction and fill the potholes. People can be difficult at times especially when you live with them twenty-four hours a day, so evolution has provided a helping hand. Understanding the link between behaviour and hormones makes life more enjoyable and productive. For example, when children watch their parents being affectionate that stimulates the release of their hormones. That reduces the inevitable friction in the home. Take that daily affection away and tension will permeate the home. When a couple behave lovingly when they meet after a hard day's work it dissolves any tension that is inevitable after a stressful day. When children are impossible, a signal or word from your partner gives you the fortitude to be calm and deal with the child. When the boss compliments you, it invigorates.

Love is circular

Much is written about love. The following is a personal perspective:

1. Love is behaviour.
2. Love is doing something for somebody and expecting nothing in return.
3. Love flows from inner peace.

4. Every human has the capacity to love.
5. Some people need help to release the flow of love.
6. The rewards of love are peace and prosperity.

The important point of this perspective is that love is circular. Love creates more love. When arms are wrapped around a loved one, both are enclosed in a circle of love. When you add children, the circle gets bigger. There is nothing better than a family hug. Love is circular because it endures, is never broken into bits, and enriches everyone it touches. Love is contagious and is productive for everyone.

The feelings associated with positive love are a direct result of the behaviour of somebody who loves us. Our nature as humans is that we expect to be loved and that we need to be loved. That is why things go horribly wrong when we are not loved or we perceive that we are not loved. Many require constant reminders that they are loved, a touch on the shoulder, a word of appreciation, a hug, or making a date to chat over a meal or coffee – alternatively, playing a game of any dimension. Rough and tumble with children can provide the touch they need. Even just a short chat at an event, while waiting outside school, at the shop, or even over the fence can mean a lot to people. This is a generalised perspective on love but more focus is required.

Mentalising

Mentalising is having ‘mind in mind’ or ‘thinking about thinking’: firstly your mind and then secondly the mind of the other. The principle is to first heal your mind, gain inner peace, and then guess or speculate what is happening in the mind of the other by listening to their words and observing body language. This is not some involved theory but a human tradition of the wise helping the inexperienced (Allen and Fonagy 2006). Inner peace can be described as self-love. Inner peace is important because when we gain that stability we can truly love others in a way that sets them on the path to their inner peace. Some gain their inner peace through faith, but the ingredients of inner peace are similar no matter how they are obtained.

Inner peace

One pathway to inner peace is finding a place in the wilderness, a beach, the top of a mountain, or sitting beside a river or some natural place where you can be alone. We are a part of the natural environment and this resonates with our being. We form attachments to people, homes, neighbourhoods, and natural places. Attachment makes us feel secure, less stressed, and more self-assured. If we understand wilderness or a natural place as our origin this strengthens the attachment. This does not apply to your bedroom. Then we must ask ourselves the basic questions of life. Who am I? What is my purpose in life? What do I want to achieve with my life? How do other people see me? Only you can answer these questions. It is like training for a race or swotting for an exam; only you can do it. Your mother, father, or God cannot answer these questions for you; you must decide; it is your life.

The inevitable answer is almost always in some way helping others, or enriching them in some way. If you have dependent children, it might be to raise them. If you are a doctor or nurse, the answer is easy. If you work in a shop, you are providing a service. If you work in a factory then you are providing people with goods they need. Whatever your occupation, when we grasp the fact that we are there to serve others, it changes our attitude from just doing a job to one of service. Our lives then take on meaning and purpose and inner peace seeps into our lives. This understanding of how connected we all are switches our focus away from ourselves and provides a much healthier perspective on life. This journey to inner peace may take some time as we walk up and down the hills of life. It may be necessary to go back to the basic questions of life repeatedly. It may be necessary to climb that mountain more than once. It may mean repairing that broken marriage, or spending more time with your children; it may mean seeking the ability to forgive. Do whatever it takes on that journey to inner peace. It may take fifty years or maybe you are just born with it. Helping others is an effective tool for curing anxiety and depression.

Supporting another

Having gained inner peace or being on the road to inner peace enables you to help others. You can love, to do something for others expecting no benefit. The key to helping others is to speculate, guess, or wait on the Holy Spirit to know what is happening in their minds. This is not an exact science and

sometimes you will be wrong but the alternative is to do nothing. Helping them can be done by observing their behaviour and listening to their words. Why are they behaving as they are or saying what they are saying? What is causing this behaviour? This should be second nature for a woman with a baby. When it is crying she has a list in her head of what might be causing her baby to cry. She speculates about the cause of crying and tries to solve the problem/the cause of the distress. This is an act of love by the mother that we think of as natural and is considered normal behaviour. When this love is not supplied things go wrong for the child; it influences brain development.

Certain adults need help to release the flow of love; this is generally caused by trauma of some sort. It could have been some event in their past or a set of circumstances that overwhelms their ability to cope with life, or it may be generational. For these people, the basic questions of life are beyond their ability or emotional capacity to ask or answer. The priority is to assist them in processing their trauma. The first step is to make friends, to gain their trust, and to talk the same language, as adapted from Suchman (2016). This is best done by somebody from the same community. Trust is needed so they can open up. This can be difficult but refining your ability to listen rather than talk is useful. Traumatized people are used to receiving advice or instructions. People who are willing to listen are rare and therefore appreciated. Open the tap and the water will flow. Once you are friends, move onto the next stage.

Prompting them to tell their stories often initiates the healing process; in the telling, they get relief from bottled-up emotions, and organising a mess of thoughts enough to tell the story also helps. Letting off steam and organising ideas helps them to file the event in their minds; it is never forgotten. This type of processing may need to happen many times but the emotional intensity will diminish each time and the traumatic event or circumstance will eventually have less influence over their lives and their behaviour. Asking specific questions is another tool to heal trauma. People seldom talk about their emotions or how they are feeling. If the trauma is generational, questions about how they felt during childhood and their experiences of childhood can be beneficial. Traumatized parents produce traumatized children. Questions about the stress in their lives are another option. Presenting them an opportunity to talk about their stress is always therapeutic. You are lancing the wound; a huge error is to tell them to get over it. Encouragement to process

the pain and hurt will ensure light at the end of the tunnel. The human mind has a tremendous ability to heal itself and all that is required is an interaction with another mind, a mind that is willing to listen and support. People so frequently isolate themselves either physically or by their behaviour. They hide in a house or office with behavioural barriers that are obnoxious to those around them to the extent that there is an unwillingness to offer help. These barriers need to be stepped over or set aside.

When the emotional storm in their minds has abated, the next step is getting them to help others using the same path that was used on them. This shifts the intense focus from themselves to a focus on somebody else. This brings perspective back into their lives; their problems are no longer mountainous but rather something they can cope with. For a young woman with a baby, it will be speculating on what is happening in her baby's mind and then acting accordingly. Helping others is a beneficial way of helping oneself as previously discussed. Be guided in whom you help. Alternatively, picking up rubbish from a beach or your park benefits others. Visiting the elderly or the sick earns brownie points.

Helping others with complex psychological problems is best left to the health professionals but for many these services are not available for financial or other reasons. So, for most, the only alternative is to help each other, something that has been happening for thousands of years. For most of human history, we lived in small groups and we did help each other because that enhanced the group's survival. In the modern world, we tend to live segregated and fragmented lives thinking that the problems of other people are not our concern or that there are skilled people equipped to help them. The stark realities of life are that we need to help each other and that we are more equipped to do so than we often think. The ideas described above are something any individual can follow and it will help. Genuine human contact is the secret that helps us all.

These are some ideas to answer the question of how. There are many ways to help the disadvantaged but the above are productive and effective. Mostly it is generational, similar to God's impact on the slaves of Egypt. Their path through life recorded in the Old Testament appears to be smoother when they

remember the instructions of God and the words of Moses. Will it be similar in our civilisation?

How to love on a community level

First thousand days

Children are unable to walk away from abusive behaviour as an adult might; they live in an environment created by their parents. The first thousand days of life, starting from conception, are critical for a child because this is a period of rapid brain development (Moore et al. 2017). Genetics change slowly so any adaptation to an environment needs to come from physiological changes. These changes are a response to the behaviour of parents and either help the child succeed in life or are a handicap. The mother is the child's environment during gestation and generally the primary caregiver and this makes the mother's mental and physical health important for the future of her child, and their potential for productivity. Stress, nutrition, substance use, physical/sexual abuse, and neglect can impact the foetus or baby and alter its future. This is a cyclic process from one generation to the next. A mother's health and behaviour influence her child and that child influences the next generation and so forth. This is important in creating perpetual poverty or prosperity. Traumatized parents tend to produce traumatized children, but it is a cycle that can be broken. Conversely, middle-class parents can be traumatized and behave as if they were living in adverse circumstances.

Children who experience adverse parenting in the first thousand days are likely to continue to experience adverse parenting as they grow up, thus reinforcing earlier developments. While it is possible to change the negative effect of adverse parenting, it becomes increasingly difficult for interventions as the child grows. The best return on an investment and the most successful is an intervention in the first thousand days, an intervention aimed at parents.

Pregnancy

There are six important factors influencing pregnant women: alcohol, smoking, drugs, stress, nutrition, and supplements. The use of alcohol and especially bingeing are red-letter behaviours. High levels of alcohol intake can cause foetal alcohol spectrum disorders that include growth restriction, decreased cognitive functioning, attention deficits, and emotional and behavioural

problems, among others (Desmond et al. 2012). Moderate consumption of alcohol increases the risk of low birth weight, being small for gestational age, and preterm birth (Patra et al. 2011). South Africa has the highest incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome in the world (Roozen et al. 2016). This is not because workers are paid with alcohol, but because bingeing over the weekend is a social custom for some communities.

Smoking has no safe lower limit and the risks generally increase with increasing rates (Smedberg et al. 2014). The risks associated with smoking are spontaneous pregnancy loss, preterm delivery, low birth weight, being small for gestational age, and stillbirth. The use of illegal drugs during pregnancy increases the risks of adverse outcomes above smoking alone (Black et al. 2013). Excessive use of alcohol, smoking, and illegal drugs can end the life of the foetus or increase the risks of adverse long-term effects on the child.

Maternal stress, anxiety, and depression can have long-term effects on some children and this is dependent on their genetic susceptibility (Glover, Ahmed-Salim, and Capron 2016). Stress is best avoided. Good nutrition is important; eat a variety of foods such as green and orange vegetables, milk, meat, poultry, fish, beans, nuts, whole grains, and fruit. Take supplements, like folic acid and iron, and make sure food is safe and clean (World Health Organisation, 2023).

Baby

For babies, the important factors are stress, nutrition, hygiene, and shelter. The last two appear to be universally practised by parents. For nutrition, breastfeeding should be initiated within the first hour of birth and infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life – meaning no other foods or liquids are provided, including water. Infants should be breastfed on demand – that is as often as the child wants, day and night (World Health Organisation, Infant and young child feeding, 2023). Stress for babies is potentially harmful. They need affection; they need responsive communication; they need attention when they cry; and they need food when they are hungry. Stress for a baby is so harmful to their potential that it has been termed toxic stress. Stress stimulates the release of cortisol and that influences the physiological functioning of the body. It alters the expression of genes altering the baby's behaviour for life.

Detailed research has shown why and how these changes occur. It is not a genetic change; those changes take thousands of years. It is termed epigenetics, without genetics. In our DNA, between the genes are proteins that influence the expression of genes acting like switches. Parents are the environment for a baby; even before birth, (Okae, et al., 2014) (Belsky, 2012) that environment produces a variable amount of stress for the baby with associated hormones and those hormones determine which switches are activated. It is a mechanism designed to make sure the child is adapted to the world in which it must survive. In one world, taking risks improves survival. In another world, making carefully considered decisions improves survival. Normally children are adapted to their parent's world and this information is conveyed to their baby by their behaviour. This produces generational poverty or prosperity. Thus, it is understandable why parental behaviour is critical for the child's future. Early interventions can change the prospects of a child: an intervention aimed at parents, not children.

Some parents behave detrimentally towards their children. The question is, why? Why would parents behave in such an abnormal way, or do what many would consider abnormal? The reality is that it happens and two explanations seem probable. Ignorance: parents are ignorant of the fact that their behaviour can detrimentally influence their children. For example, take a couple in the process of a divorce. They are so self-centred and self-absorbed that their children are forgotten. Children can be hard work, requiring a lot of parental time and attention and this is especially so in the early stages of life. Understandably, parents sometimes fail to attend to their children's needs or cries for help because of ignorance. They are ignorant of the damage this behaviour can cause. The second possibility is trauma; people can be traumatised by an event, or circumstances, or it could be generational trauma where traumatised parents tend to produce traumatised children. Whatever the cause, traumatised people can behave irrationally, make poor choices, and disrupt the stability of a home at a time when stability is critical for children. The irrational behaviour includes the adverse behaviours listed previously. If these two assumptions, ignorance and trauma, are correct, it means that any intervention to alleviate inequality must address these two factors. Parents must be educated about how their behaviour influences children and healing parental trauma is essential for children's wellbeing and healthy development.

The consequence of negative love and destructive parental behaviour is deprivation. Poverty and inequality are normally measured and reported as a lack of income. When these communities are examined in detail there is a lot more happening than just a scarcity of resources. With relationship functioning impinged they struggle to be a productive team member at work, their relationships are fragile, sexual dissatisfaction is common, substance abuse is frequent, and they have often experienced gender violence. When cognitive ability is limited, complex problems become impossible, skills are limited, and, therefore, job opportunities are limited. This generally results in poverty. Common adult health problems in this group of people include many non-contagious diseases like heart issues, hypertension, cancer, and obesity. Two contagious diseases are worth mentioning: tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. People who don't have adverse experiences as children can contract these diseases but at a reduced probability and with lower mortality rates. Impetuous behaviour is common, characterised by short-term goals, being impulsive, and being a risk taker. These last two behaviours are implicated in road accidents and crime. They mature early, have limited education, and die early violently or from disease.

All this suffering means tremendous personal pain but it also reflects an economic cost to families and society. The diseases strain the health system; crime means more police, security personnel, and prison beds; road accidents mean vehicle write-offs or repairs; and school dropouts mean fewer skills for the economy. These are big costs and result in fewer resources for future growth. The above are all indicators of a nation in a self-destructive mode: a nation that struggles to grow the economy faster than the population growth. Deprivation changes everything and the irrational behaviour that results from it will escalate, adding fuel to the destruction. The toxic stress alters the body's physiology, making the level of these diseases more prevalent. It is expensive to be poor. In a country where resources are limited, the health system must manage the extra disease burden and the loss of productivity that follows. Similar arguments apply to road accidents and crime.

Why the command to love?

When most are loved and feel loved it will bring the kingdom closer. Love is not an instant fix. Parents who change their parenting to a more love-

orientated behaviour will see benefits in their children almost immediately; however, there are limited benefits for the parents. This behaviour change won't lift their skill levels and so increase their income. Society will see the benefits when the children become adults. There is a generational delay. This is similar to the slaves who escaped from Egypt; they did not reach the promised land but their children did. When the disadvantaged are loved it may take more than one generation; benefits will be incremental.

Human history is littered with conflict and when conflict is on a level that disrupts family processes all members are likely to be traumatised. Consequently, both couples and parenting are impaired with consequences for the individuals and society. The future of society is intricately linked with the health of marriage and parenting. Marriage now needs to be defined by the relationship rather than in legal terms, a beneficial step because it brings the reality and purpose of marriage into focus. Marriage serves the biological function of producing and raising children. The success of both functions is linked to love. In Leviticus God described love in legal terms and Jesus reinforced that in softer terms by commanding us to love. In 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 Paul described love as behaviour, behaviour that enhanced relationships or eroded relationships. Today we can be much more specific and practical on how to love. If we want a future for our children we must teach them how to love and that is mostly done by example and our parenting. The link between children and the marriage that created them is so profound that a marriage can be evaluated by observing the children.

The other reason that we must love is our mental health. Love, doing something for another and expecting nothing in return, is an antidote to depression, fear, and anxiety. Modern living tends to erode our mental health and love provides a path to mental stability. Human nature at its worst tends to focus on the self; hence, there will always be a need for love. Jesus commanded us to love for sound reasons.

Conclusions

So often we are surrounded by the disadvantaged: people who need help and people who need love. We are commanded by Jesus to love our neighbour yet we Christians have mainly neglected this command. The levels of

malnourishment and unemployment are the evidence. There is a bias towards saving people rather than loving people and this has not lifted people out of their deprivation. People are set on their pathway for life by parental behaviour and, when it is detrimental, they struggle with relationships, education, impulsive behaviour, and a cluster of diseases. This has implications for the individual and their nation as a whole. This paper sets out ways you can help them. Jesus provides an example of love and it is a powerful tool.

Relevance and participation are important aspects of Christianity and helping the less privileged is good for them, you, and me. Find a group of emotionally mature women, train them as enumerated, and then support them while they mentor the young women of their community. Education, wealth, and social skills tend to divide society but together we are forming tomorrow's society. Less division is better than more division so the imperative is to break down the barriers. We are all equal in the eyes of God, hence the command to love our neighbour. Jesus provided a blueprint of practical help in the parable of the good Samaritan, something each of us can do but more focus and some understanding of human behaviour will be productive. Perhaps we need to spend less time on our knees and become the hands and feet of Jesus.

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