

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

We know that one of the two great commandments is that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. What makes a neighbor? [geographic proximity? race? religion? sharing the same social economic status?] When I was growing up, I thought that my neighbors were the people that lived on the same block of the street. And for some, it was the people that lived next door and immediately across the street.

Do you feel guilty when you see pictures of starving people on TV or in magazines? Do you at least feel touched or concerned? Should we?

Think of a time when you hesitated to respond to someone in need. What kept you from responding?

In this study a religious leader asks Jesus to tell him what it means to love one's neighbor. With his response, Jesus overturns our traditional definitions and shatters our stereotypes.

Read **Luke 10:25-37**.

Discussion:

- Put yourself in the place of the “expert in the law” who is questioning Jesus in this story. Think about how you might have felt in response to the first two encounters with Jesus. The “expert in the law” who questioned Jesus may have felt respected by Jesus’ first two interactions with him. Jesus engaged with him and drew on this man’s knowledge and expertise. With Jesus knowing all, He could have avoided or ignored the lawyer since He knew his motive—to tempt Jesus.
- The lawyer may have expected Jesus to give an answer that only people in the close proximity, or those he knew and loved were his neighbors. This would have limited him to treat only certain people as his neighbors. He may have thought that Jesus would give him a list of people that he didn’t have to love. Perhaps, he would permit him to only love those that loved him.
- As Jesus told this story in response to the question “Who is my neighbor?”, he may have had thoughts and feelings such as the many ways the religious leaders justified their failure to love others. These justifications might include having more important things to do for God; not being willing to put oneself in harm’s way for the sake of another; and judging another person as not “good enough” to qualify as our neighbor and deserve our love.
 - Note that the man that fell among thieves and the others were traveling down from Jerusalem, away from the Temple and synagogues.
- The situation described in **verse 30** was common on the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The distance from the two places is about seventeen miles, descending sharply toward the Jordan River just north of the Dead Sea. It was a descent of about 3,200 feet through rugged, bleak, rocky terrain where robbers could easily hide. It was considered especially dangerous, even in a day when travel was normally full of hazards.

- Today, there are many situations where noninvolvement is seen as a wise choice. There was a time when certain areas, and certain times of day would be situations where one would limit involvement. But now, danger and crime are not limited to specific areas or times of day.
- Situations in sharing bank or credit card information should be avoided. Trailing strangers to different locations should not happen. Going to a bank and withdrawing money for a stranger is a situation to avoid also.
- Jesus probably picked a Samaritan, someone from an ethnic group Jews detested, as the “hero” of the story (**vv. 31-33**) to change the lawyer’s way of thinking. He may have expected the Priest and Levite to help a fellow Jew in need. After all, the priests were descendants of Aaron and offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people and served in the temple. The Levites were descendants of Levi (but not Aaron) who assisted in temple service.
 - Today, the name Samaritan refers to one who does good, but in Jesus day, Samaritans were hated by the Jews, and many went out of their way to avoid them. No doubt, the Samaritans was hated by the “expert of the law.”
 - He could perhaps love his Jewish neighbors, but felt no obligation to love people of the despised Samaritan race.
 - Here in this parable told by Jesus, a Samaritan is doing good to somebody who perhaps hated him. What an act of love!
- The Samaritan went through *personal inconvenience*, *financial cost*, and *risk* to help the man in need. He stopped to aid the injured, cleaned his wounds, and placed him on his beast and no doubt walked to the inn. The oil and wine he used cost money, and the Samaritan spent two days wages on the total stranger and was willing to pay more upon returning. He also faced the risk of being attacked by thieves himself on the same road.
 - Do one or more of these factors discourage our neighborly actions?
- Christ’s question (**v. 36**) was not intended to prove that Samaritans could be better neighbors than Jews. Jesus was making a point that its our actions that determine if we are truly loving our neighbors as ourselves. Also, we see from this story that we should not label people “good or bad” simply by their nationality, ethnic background or race.
- When Jesus tells the lawyer to “Go and do likewise” (**v. 37**), he was telling him to go and show love to those in need, regardless to if you know them, or even if they are different from you. Neighbors are not defined by geographical proximity, race, religion, nor social or economic status.
- Think of a time you experienced love from someone which was expressed in a practical way. What was it like to be loved in this way.

The challenge of this parable is for us to “Go and do likewise.”

Other Points:

- This lawyer was tempting Jesus. He was trying to find errors in His speech and teaching. He was looking for something to bring accusations against the Lord.
- The lawyer wanted to exclude loving “non-neighbors.” The more appropriate question would have been, “How can I be a loving neighbor.”
- A couple of techniques that Jesus used in teaching parables is leaving out particular facts so the stories could fit different situations. Also, He would often avoid naming specific people and use the word “certain”. This too allowed the lessons to fit many different people. The word “certain” means specific but not explicitly named or stated.
- **Compassion**—sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.
- **Pity**—a feeling of distress through the ills of others, to be moved as to one’s inward feelings or heart.
- **Mercy**—compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm; an outward manifestation of pity.

Prayer: *Thank God for his all-inclusive love for each of us.*

Now or Later

In a time of quiet reflection, ask God to show you someone in your life he is calling you to love in a deeper way. Write your thoughts and feelings in response to what you sense God is saying to you.

Ask God to help you use this week’s events as opportunities to express love in unique ways. Keep a journal of what you observe and experience.

Homework: Read about The Unforgiving Servant. **Matthew 18:21-35**