

Loving Your Neighbor

Bible Background • Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:25-37

Printed Text • Luke 10:25-37 | Devotional Reading • John 5:1-15

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the concept of neighbor in the conversation between Jesus and the lawyer, VALUE all people as God does, and SHARE love and mercy with those who are in need, even those who are different from us.

In Focus

She just could not understand him. Truthfully, she had no desire to. He was just too different. The old man did not think like her, look like her, or believe as she did. He had a reputation for being cold and sometimes rude. The neighborhood children were afraid of him, and her neighbors kept their distance. Why should she be the one to reach out now that he was ill? Where were his children? They probably avoided him for good reason. Where were his friends? Ha! He probably didn't have any. Yet, she felt drawn to him. So, Mary brought Mr. Martinez a meal. He invited her to share it with him. Three hours later, she realized how dreadfully wrong she had been. Mr. Martinez was a man filled with pain as a result of being wrongly accused of a crime. Having been betrayed by a "friend," he was slow to trust. He lost his family in the process and was overwhelmed by guilt and feelings of abandonment. His pride had prevented him from reconnecting with them upon being released from prison. Now he suffered— alone. By serving him one meal, Mary became a true neighbor and gave him hope. We are exhorted to love God and our neighbors. This lesson reveals the connection between the two and encourages us to expand our definition of neighbor.

Do you have more trouble giving help to or accepting help from a stranger?

Keep in Mind

“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Yes, now go and do the same.’” (Luke 10:36-37, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Neighbor (Luke 10:27, 29, 36) plesion (Gk.) — One who is near, a fellow person

B. Priest (v. 31) hierous (Gk.) — One responsible for worship and sacrifices at the temple

Say It Correctly

Assisi. Ah-SEE-see

Judea. joo-DEE-uh

Mosaic. moh-ZAY-ik.

KJV

Luke 10:25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

NLT

Luke 10:25 One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?"

27 The man answered, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!"

29 The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

31 "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by.

32 A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

33 "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him.

34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.

35 The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'

36 "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.

The People, Places, and Times

The Road to Jericho. Travel from Jerusalem to Jericho was by way of a steeply descending road that wound through rocky places that easily hid robbers. Jericho was lower in elevation than Jerusalem, and they were about 17 miles from each other. One had to contend not only with the steepness of the road, but also with ravines, caves, and sharp turns that hindered the traveler. The road was especially dangerous because robbers were common and often attacked a person traveling alone, thus earning the road the name, "path of blood."

Laws of Purity. Priests were not to touch a corpse because it was impure. Pharisees even believed that if the shadow of a corpse fell on a person, the person became impure. Priests and Levites were expected to observe high standards of ritual purity for their sacred ministry. When the priest saw the traveler, he did not know whether the man was dead or alive. Therefore, because of the laws governing purity, he did not want to risk defilement by touching him. Such laws were not as strict for Levites, but the Levite also wanted to avoid defilement since any approach to the wounded man would have seriously compromised his position.

Background

Many times the teachers of the law, along with the scribes and Pharisees, questioned Jesus in order to test and trap Him. This was done to discredit Jesus' ministry. They were considered religious and moral authorities and highly revered among common Jews. As proclaimed "protectors" of the Law, lawyers (i.e. scribes) often questioned Jesus on religious matters. The questions were usually popular questions of the day or ones in which whatever answer was given would place you in a particular theological camp. Jesus was a master at not only giving the right answer but challenging the scribes and Pharisees to live a more God-pleasing life through the answers He gave. The answer He gives to this lawyer is a parable starring a Samaritan. Samaria was the name given to the Northern Kingdom and its capital city. After the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom, they carried off many of its inhabitants, replacing some of them with people from other conquered lands. The people of the region practiced a form of Judaism that did not include worshiping at the Jerusalem Temple, believing their local Mount Gerizim to be a holier site. They also included some of the religions of the foreigners living there. In New Testament times, the Samaritans were considered heretics and were hostile toward the Jews. They were despised by the Jews because of their mixed Jewish-Gentile blood and their different worship practices. The relationship between the two people groups was a hostile one.

How do you respond when questioned about your faith?

At-A-Glance

1. The Test (Luke 10:25–29)
2. The Parable (vv. 30–35)
3. The Moral (vv. 36-37)

In Depth

1. The Test (Luke 10:25–29)

This conversation is considered a typical one between rabbis and their students. Rabbis would often answer a question with a question and affirm (or denounce) students' responses. Perhaps this is what the lawyer was expecting when he begins this conversation with a question about inheriting eternal life. If his aim was to trap Jesus, then he failed. The Living Word caused him to go to the written Scriptures to explain himself. Note that the lawyer knows the answer. Jesus recognizes that the lawyer knows the law theoretically, but not experientially. Jesus responds, "You have answered correctly." This is not implying that eternal life is based on works. It is by faith in Christ alone. One who loves God with all His heart, soul, strength, and mind is one who desires to please Him through obedience (cf. John 15:9–14; 1 John 4:20–21). As a learned, religious Jew, the lawyer's response was the correct verbal response, but his follow-up question brings out new territory. His question is designed to put Jesus on the spot. The lawyer asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29) If he really wants to inherit eternal life, he needs to live out the commands of Scripture. Jesus' response to the follow-up question not only caused the lawyer to give his own answer, but the lawyer's response shows the relationship between the written law and the lived law of love. In short, Jesus' final word is "just do it!"

Have you seen Christians pose questions about the Bible, not for an answer, but to show off their knowledge or “trip up” a teacher or other person? What causes this behavior?

2. The Parable (vv. 30–35)

As an illustration of neighborly love, Jesus tells this parable. A man taking the dangerous journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is robbed, stripped, beaten senseless, and left on the road almost dead (v. 30). Many people during that time did not have extra clothes; therefore, clothing was a valuable item to steal. A person would expect the priest or Levite to aid an injured fellow Jew, but neither the priest nor the Levite helped the injured man. Perhaps they had any number of very sensible reasons including the purity laws, which forbade the priest and Levite touching dead things. Of course, the bottom line is that they valued their positions more than kindness. Because they longed to be right on the letter of the Law, they failed to interpret the meaning of the words. The Samaritan, however, goes out of his way to help the man. Unexpectedly, the Samaritan sets aside cultural animosity to show compassion. Even though no Jew would like to admit it, the Samaritans knew just as well as the Jews did that God loves to show mercy. This Samaritan is a picture of love to someone with whom he is neither familiar nor has any previous friendship. He was moved with compassion at seeing another’s misery. It is undeniable that the Samaritan is the better person—the true neighbor. He illustrates that a neighbor is one who sees another who is in need and uses whatever resources he has to meet that need.

How many times have you been in a situation in which someone of another race or culture stopped to help you?

3. The Moral (vv. 36-37)

The lawyer does not hesitate in answering Jesus’ (and his own) question: Who is the injured man’s neighbor? The Samaritan clearly acted beyond the norm to do all he could to show love and concern for the injured man. Therefore, the lawyer answered, “He that shewed mercy on him” (from v. 37). Once the lawyer admitted that the definition of neighbor is larger than he assumed it to be, Jesus told the lawyer that he must do as the Samaritan did if he really wanted to inherit eternal life and fulfill the Law. Race and location keep neighbors from meeting each other, even in some churches. We often look upon anyone who is not a part of our group as an outsider. God commands us to be neighborly to everyone. It does not matter whether the other person is rich, middle-class, or poor; Black, White, or biracial. Everyone is called to enter a relationship with Jesus. Our circle must be wide enough to encompass all of God’s creation.

Are their barriers to serving our neighbors today? In what ways can we show mercy to others (e.g., the Samaritan gave money and helped provide healthcare)?

3. The Total Unselfishness of Love (v. 32-36)

Jesus makes it very clear that Christians have no corner on good deeds (v. 32). The non-Christian does good to those who will return the favor and lends to those who can repay. This kind of behavior does not distinguish us as Christians. Good for good is a fair exchange. Good for evil is the mark of a believer. Jesus lays it all out in verse 35. His followers are to completely sacrifice themselves in love, energy, and possessions—even for the enemy. The basis of this is God and the very nature of His character. God is kind to the unthankful and the evil. He is merciful, bestowing His love for those who don’t deserve it. The proof: Christ loved us and died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:6,7). Following the example of loving our enemies shows that we are “children of the Highest.” In that relationship, we show that God is our Father. We show mercy to others because he showed mercy to us. The reward for our obedience is not in the favor of men but the favor of God.

How can we keep the principle of God’s mercy in the forefront of our minds?

Search the Scriptures

1. What does the lawyer say is the way to inherit eternal life? How consuming is the pursuit (Luke 10:27)?
2. What did Jesus do to illustrate how to be a good neighbor (v. 30)?

3. When the Samaritan saw the injured man, what made him stop to help (v. 33)?
4. What did Jesus encourage the lawyer to practice (v. 37)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What message should we learn from the priest and the Levite passing the injured man on the road? Were their concerns legitimate?
2. What message can we take personally from the Samaritan's willingness to stop?

Liberating Lesson

Sometimes we will not stop to help someone because we think they will harm us. We are afraid that stopping may do more injury than good. We suspect others of being involved in illicit behavior such as drug dealing or running a scam to steal money or property. Sometimes this is true, but how do you discern when to help? We look at race, location, and the appearance of the person before determining whether help should be given. We look at all of these things, but God examines hearts first. God stops and listens to our cries of distress no matter what condition we are in and comes to our rescue. The next time you pass someone who is begging or stopped on the side of the road, put yourself in their place. Wouldn't you want someone to stop and help you?

Application for Activation

Consider the cries for help and mercy within your own little world. Can you help? Will you help? Start by engaging your family in a group project. Is there a sick "neighbor" in need of help with house chores, etc.? Could the family adopt a person who is lonely and alone in life? Could the family work together to save money for a needy cause? The ideas are limitless and so are the needs.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 10:25-37

Among the Bantu people of sub-Saharan Africa, the most common philosophy about life is called "ubuntu." Ubuntu is centered on the understanding that personhood is impossible in isolation. Thus, one cannot be a person without interacting with others; a person really exists only in relationship with the community.

It is community that allows us to function as true, caring persons. Likewise, only through the gathering of persons can we have community. This sense of community is usually seen best when we encounter strangers, especially those strangers who are in need. In fact, the wellbeing of the stranger is ubuntu's end goal. In this sense then, ubuntu tells us that the answer to the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" is the entire world, especially those in need. But Jesus points out that love for the neighbor has to be predicated by love for God.

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

While only Luke records the Parable of the Good Samaritan, both Matthew and Mark join him in reporting a conversation Jesus has with a lawyer (Gk. nomikos, no-mee-KOHS, an expert of the Jewish law). This dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer is not only a prelude to the parable; it has its own important place in Jesus' work with His disciples. The lawyer was a recognized religious authority, and he tested Jesus, the unskilled Galilean lay teacher, to see if He could give correct answers to tough theological questions. The purpose was to acquire some reason to convict Jesus of blasphemy and ultimately to execute Him. First, the lawyer calls Jesus "Master" (Gk. didaskalos, dee-DASS-kal-os, meaning "teacher"). With this title, the lawyer acknowledges Jesus' authority and familiarity with the Word. The use of this word is not an acknowledgment that Jesus is the only begotten of the Father. He concedes only what many outside the Christian faith believe about Christ today: that He was simply a great teacher. Luke tells us that the lawyer asks Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He does not seek to say which of the Torah commandments is the greatest, but rather he inquires about the fundamental principle of all the commandments. Pinpointing the goal of the entire law was a common theme in rabbinical debates of that time. The word "inherit" (Gk. kleronomeo, klay-rono-MEH-oh, to receive an allotted share) is key to understanding that many Jews of the time thought that their eternal destiny was based on their Jewish descent plus their good deeds, believing these qualified them for God's blessing.

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? 27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

Jesus answers the lawyer's question with two questions, taking him to the Old Testament whose authority the lawyer would not question, being an expert in the same. Jesus wants the lawyer to state his own interpretation of the Scriptures, thereby shifting the dialogue from Jesus' teaching to the lawyer's understanding of the law. Correctly, the lawyer recites two commandments: love God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love your neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Together these two commandments formed the heart of Judaism, but they also formed the core of Jesus' own teaching. Thus, Jesus and the lawyer end up at the same place in their conversation.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. 29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

Jesus observes that the lawyer is right in his interpretation, commending his answer and exhorting him to do as he stated. However, having answered the question correctly, the lawyer asks for clarification, possibly to test Jesus further. Since loving your neighbor is a matter of life and death, the correct definition of a neighbor is of extreme importance. So, the lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbor?" In other words, he was saying, "Whom do I love?" Of course, he might have hoped that Jesus would understand—and justify—his bias against certain kinds of neighbors—those who did not belong to the Jewish family. Scholars agree that the general Jewish sense of the neighbor at the time was limited to fellow members of the covenant. Since the lawyer might have been a Pharisee, he could easily interpret the commandments in this exclusive manner. He agreed on loving neighbor, but he sought to define neighbor to include only Jews. In our contemporary context, this question may be used to justify our individualism while neglecting those neighbors that we do not like. Consequently, this question is of extreme relevance in our world where segregation tears the body of Christ apart just as much as it does any other community. Unity in diversity is a thorny subject even among Christians. Divisions take many forms and are prevalent in our communities. Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, male, female, rich, poor, educated, and uneducated are just a few of the categories we use to classify our neighbors, usually to choose which neighbor to recognize or not recognize. Unfortunately, these efforts at discriminating between neighbors affects our understanding of the church's mission in the world: to invite all people into God's kingdom without regard to our man-made qualifiers.

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

The conversation takes a twist as Jesus brings in a parable to drive the lesson home. In the parable, a man (supposedly a Jew) runs into robbers who vandalize him, strip him, and leave him half-dead. While he lies half-conscious on the wayside, a priest and a Levite pass by, and upon seeing him, they go to the other side of the road. Both the priest and the Levite are well-known religious figures. The priests are descendants of Aaron and are responsible for everything to do with Temple worship. Levites were a tribe of descendants of Levi but not of Aaron (who was also a descendant of Levi), and they assisted the priests in the Temple. The Levite in this story seems overly inconsiderate as he “came and looked” at the wounded man and proceeded without offering help. Jesus’ audience, however, might have expected that at the sight of a wounded fellow Jew, both the priest and the Levite would stop by to help him. There could be several reasons for their lack of action, among them: (1) their religious responsibilities may have prevented them from helping the wounded man since he might have appeared dead, as the law prohibited them from touching a corpse, (2) they might have been afraid of being attacked by the same robbers, and (3) they might have simply wanted nothing to do with the wounded person. It is possible that they were not indifferent to the wounded man, but their compassion might have been overcome by their commitment to religious purity. Jewish customs—not God’s Word—forbid the Jews from such contact, and the priest and Levite displayed their preference for man’s rules over godly love and mercy.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, 34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

The parable invites the audience to expect a Jewish layman to be the third traveler who responds to the wounded man, but Jesus brings a very unlikely person from a community hated by the Jews into the story—a certain Samaritan. The significance of the Samaritan in this parable cannot be overstated. If Jesus told the story to us today, He would choose another kind of person who we would be equally surprised to see show compassion, like a leather-clad biker or hardbeaten gangbanger.

The relationship between Jews and Samaritans was one of constant hostility. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be secondclass citizens, the half-breed descendants of Jews who had intermarried with foreigners (see 2 Kings 17:24–40). In return, the Samaritans had occasionally troubled Israel. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus claims that in the years between 6 and 9 A.D., Samaritans defiled Passover by scattering bones in the Temple. Because of the Samaritans’ ancestry, Jews believed that their faith was diluted, thereby making them unclean and detestable. Not only did “the Jews have no dealings with [them]” (John 4:9), but they also believed the Samaritans to be demon-possessed (John 8:48). Still, we have here a Samaritan traveling in Jewish territory. His attending to the wounded Jew jeopardized his life because he could have been easily blamed for the robbery. In addition, the Samaritans were bound by the same religious laws that bound the Jews, and therefore, the Samaritan risked defilement to take care of the possibly dead man—bandaging his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Being a Samaritan, he could not expect any such kindness from the Jews. However, unlike the priest and the Levite, he fulfilled the law, showed compassion, and helped the wounded man. He was moved by “compassion,” which here comes from the Greek word *splagchnizomai* (splonk-NEED-zo-my), which means “to be moved in one’s gut.” The guts—inward parts, entrails—were thought to be the seat of love and pity. This show of compassion mirrors that of Jesus in three instances: healing a multitude of sick people (Matthew 14:14), feeding the 4,000 (Matthew 15:32), and healing two blind men (Matthew 20:34). In each of these scenes, a feeling of pity prompted a work of mercy. Love, empathy, and mercy are motivated by someone else’s needs while withholding mercy is essentially an act of selfishness or self-protection. Jesus’ parable contrasts the lack of compassion shown by the two members of the Jewish priesthood with the Samaritan’s compassion and obedience to the Law. Any Jew would be deeply humiliated by this account which not only suggests that love can be found in unlikely places but also paints a picture in the Samaritan that may—or must—be emulated. The

mercy of the Samaritan made him give generously of his own supplies for the life of the wounded stranger. His oil and wine cleansed and soothed the wounds. He bandaged and bound the injuries and his own animal carried the man to safety. He used his own money to pay for the man's care at the inn, promising to pay for any further expenses his care would require. In cultures like those of Africa, this Samaritan would be said to be a muntu—one who has ubuntu—and thus, a person. The personhood of the priest and the Levite was diminished for not giving of themselves to help the needy. Love humanizes both the giver and the receiver—and that is what it takes to be a neighbor.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? 37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Jesus again puts the lawyer on the spot. He asks the lawyer for his opinion on who acted neighborly, based on the lawyer's knowledge of the Law and his response in verse 27. The lawyer, as Luke's narrative indicates, does not use the word "Samaritan." Although he understands the message behind Jesus' parable, the same arrogance that spurred him to justify himself in verse 29 would not allow him to confess verbally that the Samaritan acted more righteously than the priest or the Levite. His obstinacy shows how humans will refuse to give credit where credit is due. In the lawyer's eyes, Samaritans could do nothing noble or admirable, a misconception that led to this being labeled the parable of the "good Samaritan." The play on words shows how God can use what's thought of as the "worst" of society to do what's best for His kingdom. Jesus then reinforces His answer in verse 28. He advises the lawyer to do as the one who showed mercy on the beaten man had done, trying to get him to realize that keeping the letter of the Law is not enough to inherit eternal life. Love, mercy, and grace must exceed the limits of the Law, and those seeking everlasting life must exhibit these traits through faith in Jesus Christ.