

Who Is My Neighbor?

Purpose

To learn who our neighbors might be.

Hearing the Word

The Scripture for this lesson is printed below.

Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:25-37(KJV)

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?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

DAILY BIBLE STUDY

August 10	Leviticus 19:9-18
August 11	Romans 13:8-10
August 12	Romans 15:1-7
August 13	Galatians 5:4-15
August 14	Acts 27:3—28:2
August 15	Luke 10:25-28
August 16	Luke 10:29-37

Seeing the Need

Several years ago I became familiar with the phrase “random acts of kindness.” I first discovered this popular saying while watching a well-known talk show on television. The host of this particular show was interviewing individuals about doing acts of kindness in their communities. A random act of kindness might be defined as any unannounced and unplanned act of hospitality or kindness freely extended toward others. RAKs, as they are sometimes called, can also be preplanned events. They can

range from sending a note to someone, walking a friend’s dog, stopping to talk to a homeless person, giving up a seat for an elderly person, recycling cans and plastic containers, donating used books to a library, to simply giving someone a friendly smile. Needless to say, the ways to be kind to others are endless and limited only by our imaginations.

Later I would learn through research and personal inquiry that Random Acts of Kindness had become a national and international trend that seeks to inspire and empower people to share kind acts of love and compassion to others. I was amazed at the numerous books, videos, calendars, and educational research launched by the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation. There is even a Random Acts of Kindness Day on the calendar. Although many people regularly do random acts of kindness, an organized and structured effort like this, with its intentional attempt to unite hearts to collectively make the world a better place through kindness, holds great power.

The science of kindness teaches us that there is a positive power in being kind. Kindness is contagious. The good in us tends to draw out the good in others. Research has found that kindness increases love, energy, happiness, and the lifespan of individuals. Kindness tends to decrease pain, stress, anxiety,

depression, and blood pressure. In short, kindness blesses us and those around us. Is there any wonder why John Wesley advised, “Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can”?¹

The example Jesus described in Luke 10:25-37, which we typically call the story of the Good Samaritan, calls us to look at what it means to be a neighbor and to seek ways we can show kindness and extend God’s love to others.

A Lawyer’s Question

The biblical text for this lesson opens with a familiar and unfortunate scene. A religious group in the community once again tried to entrap Jesus in his words or actions. Luke 10:25 tells us that, “A legal expert stood up to test Jesus.” The word “test” or “tempt” (used in some translations) shows a clear intent of dishonesty on the part of the legal expert. On one occasion the Pharisees questioned Jesus about taxes in an attempt to trap him (Matthew 22:15), while Mark reports that the religious authorities watched Jesus in the Temple to see if he would heal on the Sabbath so that charges could be brought against him (Mark 3:2). On another occasion these pious do-gooders brought to Jesus a woman taken in adultery in an attempt to test Jesus so that they might accuse him (John 8:6). To say the least, it was a hostile and unfriendly environment in which to do ministry. Yet Jesus confronted each situation with God’s love and compassion.

In response to the deceitful question from the legal expert, Jesus immediately referred him to the teachings of the Law,

saying, “What is written in the Law?” (Luke 10:26). After all, shouldn’t a lawyer or legal expert who was versed in the laws of Moses be able to answer this question? The lawyer quickly displayed his knowledge, drawn from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, declaring that we are to “*love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself*” (verse 27). Jesus then complimented this lawyer for his superb knowledge, yet candidly told him that knowing must lead to doing. If this lawyer was going to inherit eternal life, he must “Do this and you will live” (verse 28).

Doing or following the commandments of God is where many people fall short in their spiritual walk. It is my hunch that most people know and have a real sense of right from wrong. Many people “know” to do right; however, the “doing” seems to trip them up. Jesus concluded his Sermon on the Mount with a call to not merely hear his words but to do or practice them (Matthew 7:24-27). A person who hears Jesus’ words but does not put them into practice is like “a fool who built a house on sand,” Jesus said. “The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed” (verses 26b-27). Likewise, the Apostle James reminds us to be doers of the word and not hearers only lest we mislead ourselves (James 1:22). Our human natures have no real desire to do good and serve God. Yet our spiritual selves remind us that, “God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good pur-

poses” (Philippians 2:13).

In an attempt to “prove that he was right,” the legal expert advanced the question. He moved from “what must I do to gain eternal life” to “who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). He apparently wanted Jesus to know that he was righteous in keeping all the Law. As a Pharisee, he not only loved God but loved his fellow Pharisees and those of his sect. A neighbor in his mind was very likely a person of the same cultural, racial, and religious identity. Thus he was probably a little bewildered that Jesus would tell a story complimenting a Samaritan giving unselfish aid to a Jew. Jesus, however, wanted this self-righteous Pharisee to know that the qualifications for being a true neighbor were not bound to Jewish heritage. Anyone who truly loves God will love others. Love does not overlook the needs of others. Neither is love arrogant and self-seeking but instead seeks to build up and give hope to others. If this Pharisee received this truth, he would be that much closer to eternal life.

What does it mean to you to love God with “all your being”—your heart, soul, mind, and strength?

Jesus’ Answer

Jesus answered this Pharisee’s question by telling a story. The power of a story is that people can see themselves in it. When we see ourselves through a character in a story, we very often see the answers to our questions. This was Jesus’ intent. If this Pharisee could see what a true neighbor looks like, he would hopefully repent of his arrogance and

recognize God’s desire for people to love one another.

Jesus began by telling about a man who “went down from Jerusalem to Jericho” (verse 30). Let’s not overlook the word “down” in understanding the geography of this trip. Jerusalem is built on a hill overlooking lower valleys and regions. Going “up” to Jerusalem literally means up, while going “down” literally means down. Jericho was 17 miles of rocky and rough terrain headed down from Jerusalem, the conditions ideal for bandits and thieves to prey on unsuspecting travelers. It was on this hazardous road to Jericho that Jesus provided a spiritual insight to this Pharisee.

The attack on the man traveling the Jericho road was brutal. If we are not careful, our familiarity with this story can make us insensitive to this man’s sad plight and cause us to miss the severe nature of this offense. This was a terrible violation against one human being by other human beings. He was stripped naked, beaten, and left for dead. His condition was critical and dehumanizing to say the least. We do not know how long he lay in his debilitating and weakened condition. We can only imagine his pain, anguish, and fear. He could have been killed.

This horrible incident calls our attention to the cruel reality of life. Our faith will empower and sustain us to confront and overcome the tragedies of life. Yet we cannot make light of the fact that we live in a world that often rejects good and will stop at nothing short of doing us harm in one way or another. When Jesus commis-

sioned the twelve disciples, he told them, “I’m sending you as sheep among wolves” (Matthew 10:16). What a charge! This was not a mission of naivety. Jesus wanted them to know that through the power of the Holy Spirit, they would be change agents of salt and light. God’s promise assured victory. Courage and peace comes in knowing that just as Jesus overcame the world, we too can have this same victory.

What are we to make of Luke 10:31-32? It is tempting for me as a clergy person to politely shy away from this part of the story. But the reality of this truth stares us in the face even today. Luke says that a priest came along, and upon seeing this injured man, crossed over to the other side and continued on his journey. A Levite then came along and reacted in the same way, bypassing this injured person. As a Levite, he would have assisted the priest and carried out other special duties in the Temple. These persons represented God and righteousness in the community. We like to think that their professions would demand a level of compassion on their part. Maybe they really didn’t get a good look at the injured man. Maybe they were late, had to get to the Temple, and knew that others would be coming behind them who would help. Or maybe they just didn’t care! Some have suggested that the Jewish laws related to clean and unclean forbade the priest and Levite from touching this man. Whatever the reason, Jesus saw their actions as a violation of respect for others. It certainly violated the definition of neighbor.

The Samaritan’s radical and unsolicited behavior arose from the fact that “he was moved with compassion” (verse 33). Compassion makes a difference in our relationships with others. A compassionate person has pity on the plight of others. He or she has sympathy for someone and empathizes with the feelings of another. How would I feel if someone robbed, beat, and left me for dead on this dusty road? Would I appreciate someone stopping to help me? Christian empathy moves us to act out the teaching of Christ to “Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you” (Luke 6:31).

Our means to help others might be limited and not as extensive as what the Samaritan did for this injured man, but our compassion should be limitless. Helping others in times of need is a clear and positive expression of God’s healing hand in the world. Compassionate acts are a vehicle by which we penetrate the darkness and flavor the world with signs and wonders of hope and deliverance. The great witness of showing compassion in an often compassionless world is that we declare ourselves as co-laborers with God in ushering forth God’s kingdom into the world.

Do you see yourself as a co-laborer with God? How?

Go and Do Likewise!

Jesus’ first question to the Pharisee (verse 26) showed that this legal expert understood the Law. His second question, however—“Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man?” (verse 36)—was designed to reveal whether this

Pharisee was ready to follow Jesus' command. Jesus' story gave him a picture of what God looks for in our relationships with others. Barriers and traditions should not limit love. Jesus' question of "What do you think?" gave the man a chance to reflect on the seriousness of this matter. The actions of these three travelers showed the seriousness of their faith. Jesus' question to the Pharisee demanded an answer.

His answer to Jesus was a turning point in his life. His answer—"the one who demonstrated mercy" (verse 37)—was not just a kingdom principle he had learned from Jesus, but a self-revelation of truth. It is always more meaningful and life-changing when we discover a truth for ourselves.

Jesus' final word to this Pharisee was, "Go and do likewise" (verse 37). This is our assignment as well. Hurt is everywhere and on all sides. We do not have to search for pain and trouble. It is all

around us. This Scripture text so clearly calls us to let God's love abiding in us flow to others around us. John Wesley referred to this as scriptural holiness and social holiness. Jesus said that when we minister to others and provide for their needs, it is the same as doing it for him (Matthew 25:31-46).

Take time this week to be a neighbor who cares and shares. Life this week will present us with many opportunities in various places to be the hands and feet and mouth of Jesus. Our challenge is to "go" so that others might see God's unconditional love.

What acts of love and kindness might you share with others in this coming week?

Lord, thank you for your love and care that knows no bounds or limits. Give us a heart that looks beyond the outer surface of others so that we might freely display the love of a compassionate Savior; in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

1 From umcdiscipleship.org/resources/rule-of-life.