

## Learning about Mission

Luke 10:25-37

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Have you ever found yourself ignoring a person in need, convincing yourself that someone else will stop and help? In our fast-paced world, it's easy to become desensitized to the suffering around us as we scroll past pain on our screens, and dodge discomfort in our neighborhoods.

A week ago, when I was mowing our lawn, a young man on a bike stopped on the sidewalk and waved to get my attention. I was in a hurry but shut off my mower and went over to talk to him. He introduced himself as Oscar, with broken English, telling me he was from the country of Benin. He asked if he could do some work for me, explaining that he had recently lost his job. I told him I would think about it and asked for his phone number in case I thought of something. While I was putting his number in my phone, I realized I was just being polite and, in my heart, I had no intention of helping him. After all, it could be risky because I didn't know him, and I was in a hurry to finish mowing so I could get on to my next activity.

One day, Jesus told a story which shattered comfort zones while exposing the human heart. You know it as the Parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the most well-known parables of Jesus. The popularity of this parable in some ways works against it. It's so familiar that we think we know everything there is to know about it, without knowing that we might not really know it. You know what I mean?

Here's our main idea: *A neighbor is anyone in need whom God places in my path.*

Our text is Luke 10:25-37. Before we read it, it's helpful to see there are two matching dialogues between a lawyer and Jesus.

### Dialogue One

- Lawyer asks a question (25).
- Jesus asks lawyer a question (26).
- Lawyer answers Jesus' question (27).
- Jesus answers lawyer's question (28).

Let's read this first section: *“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’<sup>26</sup> He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’<sup>27</sup> And he answered, ‘You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’”*

## Dialogue Two

- Lawyer asks a question (29).
- Jesus tells a story and asks a question (30-36).
- Lawyer answers Jesus' question (37a).
- Jesus answers lawyer's question (37b).

Now, let's read verses 29-37: *“But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.<sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.<sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’<sup>37</sup> He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise.’”*

Since each of these dialogues are introduced with a question, let's utilize these questions as our outline.

**1. What shall I do to inherit eternal life?** We see this in verse 25: *“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’”* This law expert was adept at understanding the Old Testament and wanted to trip Jesus up so the people would stop listening to Him. This tactic was also used in Luke 20:20: *“So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.”*

Specifically, this sophisticated Scripture scholar was “heresy hunting” by attempting to discredit Jesus. Do you see the contradiction in his question? He’s wondering what he must *do* to inherit eternal life. It can be translated literally like this: “*By doing what shall I inherit eternal life?*” But an inheritance is not something we work for; it’s a gift that comes from being born or adopted into a family.

As Jesus often did, He turned the question back on the questioner in verse 26 by asking two questions, one propositional and one more personal: “***He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’***” In his book, *Questioning Evangelism*, Randy Newman goes through all the gospel passages where Jesus answers a question by asking His own question. He argues that we should do the same in our evangelism. This book is available at the Café Resource Center.

The man answers correctly by citing Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: “***And he answered, ‘You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.’***” This man is simply repeating what we learned last week when Jesus gave the Great Commandment: *To love God supremely and love our neighbors sincerely.*

In verse 28, Jesus affirms him for giving the right answer (the word is “orthos” from where we get orthodoxy, which means “correct belief”) and at the same time flips the tables: “***Do this and you will live.***” This is “orthopraxy,” which refers to “correct behavior.”

Jesus used a similar approach with the rich young ruler in Mark 10 by pointing to the Law to reveal his idolatry. The phrase, “***do this***” means “*to keep on doing this forever.*” The word “***love***” is in the present tense, meaning constantly and continuously, which means we’re to love God and our neighbors perfectly, all the time. James 2:10 shows us this is impossible: “***For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.***”

Here’s the second question...

**2. Who is my neighbor?** Instead of owning his inability to keep the law, in verse 29, the lawyer looked for a loophole and asked, “***But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’***”

The man now seeks to defend himself and deflect his responsibility by asking for a definition of the word “**neighbor.**” He’s hoping to be acquitted on a technicality in the Law. What the lawyer wanted to know is not, “*Who is my neighbor?*” but “*Who isn’t my neighbor?*”

*A neighbor is anyone in need whom God places in my path.*

The Jews typically interpreted “**neighbor,**” as “*one who is near,*” or a fellow Jew. The Pharisees tended to reject “ordinary people” as neighbors, while the community at Qumran excluded everyone who was not part of their group.

Jesus doesn’t directly answer his question but instead tells a simple story. To keep us from checking out because the parable is so familiar, let’s view the events through the tear-filled eyes of the wounded man. Please follow along in your Bible.

*I had just left the Temple in Jerusalem and was on my way home to Jericho, which was about 20 miles away. Jericho was a preferred place to live, like an oasis in the desert. The road I took was treacherous and dangerous, dropping some 4,000 feet from beginning to end.*

*There were huge boulders and caves where robbers would hide out. It was called the “bloody pass” because so many who passed this way got beat up and robbed. I knew I shouldn’t be out there alone, but I was eager to see my family.*

*As I rounded a sharp bend, a man jumped off a rock and on to my back. Another took me out at the knees. I felt a third guy grab my head and begin slamming it against the jagged rocks. I tried to scream but nothing came out. They took all my money and ripped my clothes off my back. As they got up to leave, the bigger guy kicked me in the face, and I felt excruciating pain as one of my teeth tumbled into the dirt. Another guy slugged me in the stomach, and I started vomiting.*

*I don’t know how long I laid there because I slipped in and out of consciousness. Eventually, I heard some noise and thought the robbers were coming back to finish me off. I had a difficult time focusing but I could make out a priest coming my way. Surely, he would help because he had just come from worshipping God in the Temple. I saw him glance at me with*

*disgust and then look away as he moved to the opposite side of the path where he picked up his pace and vanished around a corner.*

*A few minutes later, a Levite came upon me. He slowed down and gazed at me. I was relieved because surely this religious professional would help. He seemed grossed out by my wounds and quickly scurried to the other side of the road and was gone. I thought I was a goner.*

*I didn't know why they didn't stop and help. Maybe they were anxious to get home or perhaps they thought it was too dangerous. Maybe they thought I was dead and didn't want to become unclean by touching me or perhaps they were in a hurry to finish mowing their lawns.*

*By now the sun was going down and I couldn't get up. I was just starting to shut my eyes and drift off when I saw a blurry image of a man on a donkey. I could tell by the way he was dressed and by his features that he was a Samaritan. Initially, I recoiled at his presence, but I needed some help.*

*Our people hated people like him and he hated people like me. Our animosity went back generations to when his ancestors intermarried with pagans. My forefathers burned the temple of the Samaritans to the ground, and they responded by sneaking into our temple and defiling it. This was the Samaritan's opportunity to spit on me or finish me off.*

*I couldn't believe what happened next. I saw compassion in his eyes. He jumped off his donkey and knelt to see how he could help. He took his flask of expensive wine, which served as an antiseptic and poured it on my wounds. Then, he showered my sores with soothing oil. He even ripped some of his clothes and used the strips as bandages.*

*When the bleeding stopped, he lifted me up and put me on his donkey and walked next to me for miles until we came to an inn. He stayed up all night taking care of my needs, bringing me water and trying to get me to eat something.*

*The next day he took out two denarii (which represented two days' wages) and gave them to the innkeeper and urged him to look after me until he could return. That was enough money for about two weeks' worth of food and lodging. He even told the motel manager to put any extra charges on*

*his tab and he would settle up when he returned. This was over the top, but I was grateful because people who couldn't pay their debts were often sold into slavery.*

*The Samaritan used his own oil, his own wine, his own donkey, his own money, his own credit, and his own time to care for a neighbor he had never met before.*

I see at least two main points of this parable. The first has application to those of us who are already born again. The second application, which gets to the main purpose of the parable, is for those who have yet to be converted.

**1. For believers.** In verses 36-37, Jesus pressed home the point of the parable to the religious man: ***“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise.’”***

The question is not *“Who is my neighbor?”* but rather, *“Am I being neighborly to everyone, even my enemies?”* The law expert put the emphasis on whether a person was worthy of love; Jesus put the emphasis on the one who does the loving. The lawyer wanted a definition, and a limitation; Jesus defined love as limitless.

*A neighbor is anyone in need whom God places in my path.* To ask, *“Who is my neighbor?”* is to look for a loophole by focusing on what claim others have on my time, energy, and resources. To ask, *“Whose neighbor, am I?”* is to focus on what I owe to the suffering people all around me.

The law-expert answered correctly when he said that the neighbor was ***“the one who showed him mercy.”*** Notice, he couldn't even say the word “Samaritan” and yet he is told to go and do as the Samaritan did. Not just once, but as a lifestyle of loving servanthood.

Write this down: We are not saved *by* loving our neighbor, but we are saved *to* love our neighbor. Martin Luther had some good insight: *“You do for your neighbor what Jesus would do in His compassion so that your neighbor will see Jesus working through you.”*

The religious people in this story gave the right answers but they didn't apply what they knew. They spent all their time worshipping and praising but didn't work it

out practically. They came from God's presence but somehow God's presence never got through to them. It can happen to us as well. We just sang, "The Lord Reigns" and "Yes, I Will" and yet, we can leave here and ignore the needs around us.

Verse 31 says the priest "***by chance***" was going down the road when he came across a need. There's no such thing as a coincidence with God, is there? God orchestrates our days and activities and provides opportunities for us to meet needs. Ephesians 2:10 says: "***For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.***" I'm saddened when I think of how many "good works" I pass up every day. Will you pass by on the other side when God purposely brings people across your path?

When the Samaritan saw the man, he "***had compassion***" on him. This is a strong word in the Greek referring to the inner recesses of the stomach and bowels. It's the idea of being deeply moved in your gut. One of the best definitions I've heard for compassion is this: "*Your hurt in my heart.*" His emotion led to motion. Compassion must lead to action. Seeing led to sympathy, which led to service.

Every part of the Samaritan was involved in helping – his eyes, heart, feet, hands, thoughts, time, possessions, speech, and money. On top of that he crossed a cultural, racial, and religious boundary. He turned off his lawn mower and helped the hurting.

Another direct application of this parable involves reaching out to our literal neighbors. Several years ago, the Dispatch-Argus ran an editorial entitled, "Whatever Happened to Being a Good Neighbor?"

*Where did all the neighbors go? Unfortunately, for most of us, the "neighbor" concept seems to have faded away. Yes, we reside near each other, but the proximity has no meaning, as we have gotten used to a life of self-imposed isolation. We reside indoors, with the doors closed, leave through our garages, come back to our homes, close our garages and repeat it day by day without interacting with the persons living a few feet away.*

In their book, *The Art of Neighboring*, the authors suggest a simple strategy.

- **Get to know the names of eight of your neighbors.** Please take one of the “Who is my neighbor?” cards from the seat back in front of you. Imagine the middle box is your house or apartment and the other boxes are the eight houses or apartments situated nearest to you. I recognize no one lives in a neighborhood that looks like a tic-tac-toe board, and some of you have neighbors who may be miles away but try to picture your nearest neighbors.

Simply put the names of eight of your neighbors in the boxes. To take some pressure off, when this exercise has been given in different venues around the country, only about 10% can come up with eight names. Simply use it as a tool.

That may lead to an awkward conversation that may go like this, “*Hey, we’ve been living here 12 years and haven’t ever met,*” but that’s OK. Later, you can add relevant information about their family, occupations, hometowns, or hobbies. Put this card somewhere obvious to remind you who to pray for and who you still need to meet.

- **Be visible in your neighborhood.** Take walks. Hang out in your front yard for one hour this week.
- **Plan and implement a block party.**
- **Consider hosting a neighborhood 5-Day club.**

The story is told of a photographer working for a Christian magazine. The editor commissioned him to get a picture of someone who characterized the destitute condition of humanity. After a great deal of searching, he finally captured the perfect picture. From a shadowed alley he spotted a beggar pleading for food as he stretched toward a bakery displaying fresh bread. The photographer got into position and eagerly snapped the picture.

He quickly emailed the picture to his editor. The editor agreed that it perfectly depicted humanity’s misery. After congratulating the photographer, the editor peered deeply into his eyes and asked: “*And what assistance did you give him after you took his picture?*” With a twist of discomfort, the man confessed that he had done nothing. The editor responded: “*You got the picture, but you didn’t get the message.*”

I haven't been able to stop thinking about Oscar and my hard heart toward him. On Monday, the Lord prompted me to reach out to him and give him some financial assistance. When I connected with him, he invited me into his sparse apartment. When I gave him some money, he bowed his head in gratefulness. I also gave him *Anchor for the Soul* and an invite to church. When I asked if I could pray for him, he immediately dropped to his knees and folded his hands. I placed my hand on his shoulder and prayed for him to find a job. I also quietly thanked God for softening my hard heart toward a neighbor.

**2. For unbelievers.** The question, "*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" is easily the most important question any person can ask. The primary purpose of this parable is to convince those who think they're good enough to realize that there is no way to inherit eternal life by doing good works.

You're not good enough, but there is One who *is* good enough. Put your faith and trust in Jesus. Don't be like the religious man who, instead of being justified by throwing himself on the mercy of God, tried to justify himself.

Don't miss the main message of this story. If you are not yet a believer, don't leave here and just do a bunch of good works by being nice to your neighbors, thinking that will somehow get you into Heaven.

It's impossible to live up to God's standards. The Law doesn't save but shows us we need saving. There can be no real conversion without conviction. That's why you need a substitute, one who will take your place.

Jesus is the true and better Samaritan. He comes along and sees us wounded on the side of the road. Satan has left us for dead and our sins have consumed us. Our dignity has been robbed, and our righteousness has been stripped.

When no one else cares, Christ comes to us with compassion, cleans our wounds and carries us to safety, paying our sin debt so we will no longer be enslaved. He pays for it all Himself, bringing hope to the hopeless and healing to the hurting. This inheritance can be yours when you enter the right family through the new birth.

## **Invitation**

*God, I confess that I fall way short of loving You and loving others. I am not only selfish; I admit that I am a hard-hearted sinner. I can't help myself and nothing*

*else seems to work either. Please rescue and redeem me so that I can be forgiven and set free. I believe You sent Your Son Jesus to fulfill the requirements that I cannot keep and right now I receive what He has done for me. I ask you, Lord Jesus to save me from my sins and it's my desire to follow You for the rest of my life. If there's anything in my life that You don't like, please get rid of it. And help me now to be mission ready so I can respond to those who have fallen on the path of life. Help me also to love my literal neighbors by engaging with them. Give me Your compassion and enable me to put my faith into action by serving others.*