THE GOOD NEIGHBOR

• an example of profound kindness
• a parable of mercy and compassion
• a lesson in loving our neighbor

KEY VERSES

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. —Matthew 22:37-40

And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. —Luke 6:31

PROLOGUE

Do you know any of your neighbors? Sometimes people don’t know their neighbors. Maybe they don’t think it’s important to put forth the effort required to be neighborly. Or maybe their neighbors live far enough away they’ve just never had much interaction with them.

Being neighborly can lead to developing good friendships and allowing our lights to shine.

Ask your children: Do you think it is a good idea to know your neighbors? The wise King Solomon was once inspired to write, “Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,’ when you have it with you. Do not devise evil against your neighbor, for he dwells by you for safety’s sake” (Proverbs 3:28-29). Clearly both being a good neighbor and having good neighbors is valuable, sometimes even providing the blessing of additional safety by proximity. Being neighborly can also lead to developing good friendships and allowing our lights to shine (Matthew 5:16).

Sometimes people make the mistake of showing compassion to one person over another, rather than extending this kindness to everyone. By the first century, for example, certain isolated religious communities had become established. Jews and gentiles (anyone not of the Jewish faith) lived and operated separately, for the most part. It was a well-known fact that Jews and Samaritans did not intermingle (John 4:9) because the Jews did not consider the Samaritans and other gentiles to be their neighbors. But Jesus Christ, Jewish by birth and God in the flesh, was about to teach them just what it meant to be a good neighbor and the importance of showing mercy and compassion to all.
STORY AND STUDY

(This account can be found in Luke 10:25-37.)

The lawyer

One day Jesus was talking with a lawyer. The lawyer wanted to test Jesus’ knowledge and application of Scripture, so he asked Him, “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus answered him with another question: “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” Rather than respond to the question immediately, Jesus waited to hear the lawyer’s level of understanding first.

Pause for thought: Why might it be a wise approach to ask another question before responding?

The lawyer responded to Jesus Christ’s question that you have to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength and love your neighbor too (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus told the lawyer his answer was right: “Do this and you will live.”

Then the lawyer asked, “And who is my neighbor?” Scripture even records the lawyer’s motivation in asking this question: he was seeking to justify himself.

But rather than defining who his neighbor was, Jesus answered him with a story about being a neighbor.

The story Jesus told

A man was walking from the city of Jerusalem to the city of Jericho. While he was walking along the road, a group of robbers attacked him. They beat him up. They tore off his clothes. They stole his money. They knocked him out and left him, wounded and bleeding, on the side of the road.

Factoid: From Jerusalem to Jericho was a particularly treacherous stretch of road, sometimes referred to as “the bloody way.” It was roughly 17 miles (27 kilometers) long and was composed mostly of rough and rocky terrain, since it descended from the mountainous area of Jerusalem down to the plains surrounding Jericho. Thieves and robbers could easily hide behind crags and attack unaware travelers.

Pause for thought: Could we learn a lesson about travel safety from this story? Sometimes emergencies require immediate travel, and we can’t always anticipate the dangers that may lie ahead when we embark on a journey. And sometimes accidents simply happen. But in the meantime, we can make wise decisions. Praying for God’s protection should always be the first thing we do before leaving on any journey. Studying our route ahead of time or learning about the culture of the place we are traveling to are two things we can do to prepare for a trip. What else can we do?
In time, a priest came along the same road and saw the bleeding man lying on the roadside. But the priest crossed to the other side. He hurried away without helping the man. Perhaps he was in a great rush or was too afraid to help. Regardless of his reasons, he should have had compassion on the man and stopped to help.

**Both of these men—religious leaders—should have been the first to offer assistance.**

Then a Levite came along the same road. He saw the wounded man and looked away. He crossed the road and didn’t help the man. He, too, should have felt compassion and stopped to help.

Both of these men—religious leaders—should have been the first to offer assistance. Sadly, they closed their hearts and did nothing to help.

Then a Samaritan man came along the road. He saw the body and went over. What a terrible sight! A bloody, wounded man, barely alive! The Samaritan had great concern for him and immediately began to help.

With oil and wine from his saddlebag, the Samaritan cleaned the man’s wounds, then bandaged them. He lifted the man onto his donkey and took him to an inn. The Samaritan found the man a bed and watched over him that night.

**Factoid:** When grapes, grains and potatoes undergo the fermentation process, they become alcohols that contain the chemical compound ethanol, or ethyl alcohol. Ethyl alcohols have natural antiseptic and sterilization properties. Natural oils, like olive oil, help to soothe skin irritations and act as a salve on wounds. Some oils even help speed the healing process. Many oils are used in skin care products today.

The next day, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper enough money to finish caring for the man and told him, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.”

**“So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?”**

**Jesus’ question and directive**

Jesus asked the lawyer, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?”

It is interesting to note that in his response, the lawyer couldn’t even bring himself to say the word Samaritan—further evidence of the rift between Jew and gentile at the time. The lawyer instead responded, “He who showed mercy on him.”

Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

We can only wonder what the lawyer’s ultimate response to this story was since Scripture does not give us any more information. We can only hope that he at least understood from the parable that the
Samaritan man acted in the most neighborly and loving manner toward the beaten man. He also appears to have been silenced from asking further questions of justification.

Regardless of how the lawyer chose to act for the remainder of his life, we can learn a great deal from the parable of the Good Samaritan and from Jesus Christ's directive to “go and do likewise.”

_Surely if anyone knew what true religion looked like it should have been the priests and Levites!_

_The cast of characters_

Explain to your children that the choice of characters Jesus Christ used to illustrate His parable is highly significant. He could have chosen to present the travelers anonymously, but instead He described them by their occupation or ethnicity: priest, Levite, Samaritan. We can gain deeper insight into this parable by studying why He used these three descriptions.

Priests and Levites were considered high-ranking religious and moral authorities of the time. Among other responsibilities, they offered atoning sacrifices on behalf of the people, provided instruction in righteousness, and guidance in worship. They also clarified matters of judgment and Judaic law, which would have included the debated topic, Who is my neighbor?

_Jewish authorities had developed traditions and rules that reinforced ritual rather than Scripture._

Surely if anyone knew what true religion looked like it should have been the priests and Levites! But by this point in history, the Jewish authorities had developed man-made traditions and rules that reinforced ritual rather than Scripture. Disputes over the nature of the law and these traditions would continue on into the early New Testament Church (Acts 5:29; 10:28; 11:2-3; Galatians 2:11-14).

But rather than become involved in the debate at that time, Jesus Christ chose to address the attitude of the heart and to expound on the principle of the second greatest commandment (Matthew 22:39). His parable illustrated what true love toward neighbor looks like in action.

Jesus Christ chose the controversial character of a Samaritan man to further illustrate this concept. To a Jewish audience, He presented such a picture of outpouring love and concern for neighbor that the example of the Samaritan man’s actions could not be contested, even by the Jewish religious authorities. It was the Samaritan—not the priest or the Levite—who showed true religion in action to the wounded man. Even the lawyer—an expert in the law—could not dispute this.

_Pause for thought: What other examples in Scripture can you think of that discuss pure religion? Hint: These examples can best be found where love is an action. Parents, once you’ve discussed this with your children, you may wish to direct them toward the following scriptures: Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; James 1:27._
God wants us to both obey Him out of love and show compassion for other people without partiality or prejudice.

**Conclusion**

Jesus Christ showed great wisdom in avoiding contentious arguments while at the same time illustrating the depth of application of the second greatest commandment: love toward neighbor.

Explain to your children that God wants us to both obey Him out of love and show compassion for other people without partiality or prejudice (*Romans 2:11*). Loving our neighbor requires putting selfishness aside, humbling ourselves, and taking on the mind and character of Jesus Christ (*Philippians 2:3-5*). We’re not meant to be alone; we’re meant to help one another.

Jesus never answered the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” Why? Because defining or labeling some people as our neighbors and others as outsiders leads to an exclusionary mind-set. Rather, Jesus Christ directs our focus toward the importance of the need for love and compassion for all people. Being a good neighbor is a matter of the heart.

**QUESTIONS**

1. **Knowledge**
   In Jesus’ story, how many people saw the man lying on the road?

2. **Comprehension**
   What did the Samaritan do to take care of the wounded man?

3. **Connections**
   Which of the three men did Jesus want the lawyer to be like?

**DISCUSSIONS**

1. Why do you think the priest and the Levite didn’t help the bleeding man? Were the priest and Levite bad people? Were they more concerned about themselves than about the life of the man lying on the road? Were they afraid?

2. Do you think Jesus’ story was about more than just helping someone on the roadside? Did Jesus want the lawyer to look for people hurt on the road, or was He teaching a bigger lesson?

3. Who takes care of people injured in bad accidents today? What do emergency medical technicians do when they come to an accident? Did the Samaritan man do some of the things an EMT would do at an accident scene?

4. It is a good idea to check with your parents when you want to help someone. Can you think of any reasons why that might be important?
ACTIVITIES

1. My First Aid Kit

The Samaritan carried wine, olive oil, and cloth bandages in his saddlebag. He used those things to give first aid to the wounded man. With the help of someone in your family, make a little first aid kit in a portable or ziplock bag. What do you need to take care of little scrapes and scratches? What would you put in your first aid kit? Are there right ways and wrong ways of putting on a bandage? If your family already has a first aid kit, ask your parents where it is and to explain its contents.

2. Neighborhood Watch

In some areas, people work together to keep their neighborhood clean and safe. Look around your apartment complex or your street. Are there things that would make your neighborhood nicer or safer?

- Picking up trash?
- Cleaning up bus stops?
- Painting some buildings?
- Taking in empty trash cans?
- Trimming bushes and planting flowers?

What is one small thing you can do to keep your neighborhood clean?

3. Visiting Hours

Do you know someone recovering from an illness? Or someone sick in a hospital? Do you know someone in a nursing home who would appreciate a visit? Ask your parents to help you make and deliver chicken soup to someone recovering from a cold. Or mail a get-well card with some tea enclosed. Find out hospital or nursing home visiting hours and plan a brief visit. Ask if the patient has any needs you can help provide.