Serving Neighbors, Serving God

Bible Background • Luke 10:25–34
Printed Text • Luke 10:25–34
Devotional Reading • Matthew 22:33–40

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE Jesus’ teaching about compassion for our neighbors; REFLECT on the connection between serving our neighbors and serving God; and EXPAND our vision and application of service to neighbors and to God.

InFocus

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 of 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. 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 re-connecting with them upon being released. 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.

Keep in Mind

"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:36–37).
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,
       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.

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.

The People, Places, and Times

**Lawyer.** Lawyers or experts in law (Gk. *nomikos*, no-mee-KOHS) are generally believed to be scribes who specialized in studying, teaching, and defending the Law of Moses. They may have been associated with the Pharisees who were well-versed in Mosaic Torah, and Luke groups them together several times (7:30; 11:53). Therefore, they were considered religious and moral authorities, and highly revered among common Jews. As proclaimed “protectors” of the Law, lawyers (scribes) are often found in Scripture questioning Jesus on religious matters. Luke uses the term frequently. They are often portrayed as arrogant, unbelieving, and hypocritical (see Matthew 23:23–28).

**Jerusalem to Jericho.** The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho was 17 miles long and on a steep decline of approximately 3,000 feet (thus the term “going down from Jerusalem”). The winding road was filled with rocky places and caves that served as hiding places for robbers. It was known to be a dangerous route, as robberies were common, especially for lone travelers.

**Samaritans.** In 721 B.C., the Northern Kingdom of Israel was defeated by Assyria, and its people were deported. The king of Assyria repopulated the area with foreigners, and those people intermarried with Jews. The result was Samaritans, a mixed race of people with some Jewish ancestry, and “impure” religion, being a combination of Jewish traditions and pagan/idol worship. Samaritans were, therefore, despised by Jews, and the relationship between the two people groups was a hostile one.

Background

Jesus has just sent out His disciples to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick and cast out demons. He gave them instructions for the mission, and they faithfully followed them, and saw the power of God in tangible signs. They were amazed and came back rejoicing when giving Jesus the full report of their ministry. Jesus takes the time to let them know that although what they witnessed was amazing, it pales in comparison to the fact that their names are “written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). This causes Jesus to rejoice and thank God. Jesus thanks God
that what He has told them has been kept from the wise and the proud of this world. In contrast, it has been given to those who are “babes” in understanding (v. 21).

This sets the stage for a teacher of the law to ask a question. 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. 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.

At-A-Glance


2. The Parable (vv. 30–34)

In Depth


This conversation is considered a typical one between rabbis and their students. Questions about eternal life were common. Rabbis would often answer a question with a question (“How do you read it?”) and affirm responses (“You have answered correctly”). However, the lawyer, coming from a mentality of authority, was not seeking to learn, but to test. As a learned, religious Jew, his response quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 was the correct verbal response, but the motive behind his follow-up question (to justify himself) revealed the flaw in his heart. There was no intention to love his neighbor, only to maintain his reputation.

Jesus’ response, “You have answered correctly,” 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 has faith in Him, and desires to please Him through obedience. One cannot say that they love God, without obeying Him and loving others (John 15:9–14, 1 John 4:20–21).
2. The Parable (vv. 30–34)

As an illustration of neighborly love, Jesus tells this parable. During Jesus’ time, Jewish religion and culture dictated that “good” Jews avoid impure things and people. Samaritans, as “mixed breeds,” would fall into this category. Priests and Levites (along with Pharisees) were considered “holy” ones, striving to maintain the appearance of righteousness.

As such, a person would expect the priest or Levite to come to the aid of an injured fellow Jew. For many possible reasons, both of them selfishly and intentionally avoided the injured traveler. Unexpectedly, the Samaritan set aside cultural animosity to show compassion and serve another. He uses his time by going out of his way (takes him to an inn, and plans to return), his resources (his animal, oil, wine, money), and his energy (walks while allowing the man to ride). He is a picture of agape-love (love without commonalities or friendship) and mercy (compassion at seeing another’s misery). It is undeniable that the Samaritan is the better person—the true neighbor. He illustrated that a neighbor is one who sees another who is in need, and using whatever resources he has, meets that need.

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 is implied to be one way for the lawyer to show love toward his neighbor (vv. 36–37)?

Discuss the Meaning

Jesus’ parable reveals that opportunities to be neighborly can come at any time. Our love for Him should compel us to show mercy. What are barriers to serving our neighbors? In what ways can we show mercy to others (e.g., the Samaritan gave money, etc.)?

Lesson in Our Society

There are many examples of the lack of mercy and love in our society. There are executives who choose to lay off hard-working employees while accepting million-dollar bonuses. Some people take advantage of funds designated to help those in need. However, the opposite is true as well. There are tales of “heroes,” people who rise up during tragedies to rescue, tend to, and provide for complete strangers. It is often said that this is the reflection of the
good in humanity. In actuality, it is a reflection of God’s love and mercy. Without Him, there would be no “good” in humanity.

**Make It Happen**

We are often faced with unexpected opportunities to serve our neighbors. There are people with needs all around us, and we have specific resources to help. Whom is God impressing upon you to serve? What opportunities have you been presented with that you have chosen to ignore because it will cost you time, money, energy, or comfort? Ask God to reveal these to you. Pray that He would give you greater awareness of those around you and a boldness to serve in spite of difficulty.

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

**Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

**More Light on the Text**

**Luke 10:25–34**

Among the Bantu people of sub-Saharan Africa, the common life philosophy is called “ubuntu.” It is, of course, known by different names in different Bantu languages, but its propositions are the same wherever one goes. 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 relationships with other people—the community which makes him or her and which is also made by him or her. Thus, the community constitutes the individuals within it, but it also constituted by the same individual. They say, “I am because we are, and we are because I am.” There is no personhood without community, but there is also no community without personhood. They find the Western maxim “I think therefore I am” too individualistic and misleading.

This sense of community usually works best when we encounter strangers, especially those strangers who are in need. This is when one’s personhood—ubuntu—is stress-tested since
the well-being of the other, or the stranger, is ubuntu’s telos (Gk. TEH-lohs, end, goal, or purpose). 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 suggests further 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?

Many readers bypass this initial story of the lawyer (Gk. nomikos, no-mee-KOHS; cf. Mark 12:28–34, the expert of the law “scribe,” Gk. grammateus, grah-mah-teh-OOS)—who tested Jesus as they rush to the more popular story of the parable of the Good Samaritan. However, 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. In the Matthean and Marcan parallels, the scribe asks which is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34–40) or which is the first (Mark 12:28–34). In Mark’s account, Jesus answers the question, and the scribe approves of Jesus’ answer. Matthew’s account is a shorter version and includes only the scribe’s question and Jesus’ answers. However, in Luke’s writing here, the lawyer asks Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Matthew and Luke say that the lawyer tested (Gk. ekpeirazo, ek-pay-RAHD-zo, to put to the test, try, tempt) Jesus. The lawyer was a recognized religious authority, and he tested Jesus, the unskilled Galilean lay and unofficial teacher, to see if He could give correct answers to tough theological questions. Thus, the lawyer tried to entrap Jesus, wanting to discredit Him if He gave a wrong answer.

Luke’s version does not seek to say which of the Torah commandments is the greatest, but rather inquires about the fundamental principle of all the commandments. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” One who knew the Mosaic law tested Jesus, not as in Matthew about individual laws, but about what he must do to inherit “eternal life,” which is the goal of the entire law (Marshall 442). This question also appears in Luke 18:18, where Jesus had a conversation with the rich young ruler. It was a common theme in rabbinical debates of that time (Marshall 442). The word “inherit” (Gk. kleronomeo, klay-ro-no-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. They believed that their good deeds qualified them to receive a future blessing from God (Marshall 442).

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. Marshall observes that some scholars believe that Jesus’ question is actually, “How do you recite?” Thus the lawyer recalls the Shema from Deuteronomy 6, which he probably recited daily. However, Jesus is asking for more than just a recitation. He wants the lawyer to state his own interpretation of the Scriptures, thereby shifting the dialogue from Jesus’ teaching to the lawyer’s interpretation of the law. Correctly, the lawyer recited two commandments: love God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love your neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Together these two commandments formed the heart of the Jewish religion (Marshall 443–444), 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, and tells him, “Do this, and you will live.” 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—neighbors who, in this case, did not belong to the Jewish family. Scholars agree that the general Jewish sense of the neighbor at the time was limited to members of the same people, religious communities, fellow Jews, or fellow members of the covenant (Marshall 444, 446). Marshall adds that there was a tendency among the Pharisees to exclude Samaritans, foreigners, and other ordinary people from the definition (444). Plummer observes that a Jew “except [ed] all Gentiles when he spoke of his neighbor” (285). 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. He wanted to define neighbor—which then defines for him who is not a neighbor.

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 among the categories we use to classify our neighbors, usually to choose which neighbor to recognize or not recognize. Unfortunately, these discriminating definitions of neighbors affect the church’s understanding of its mission in the world. God’s mission is to invite all people into His 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) went down from Jerusalem to Jericho—a journey along a road that descends over 3,000 feet through treacherous desert and dangerous rocky country that could easily hide bandits. On his way, the man met robbers who vandalized him, stripped him, and left him half-dead. While he lay half-conscious on the wayside, a priest and a Levite passed by, and upon seeing him, they went on the other side of the road. Both the priest and the Levite were well-known religious figures. The priests were descendants of Aaron and were 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.
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.

The plot of the story 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 relationship between Jews and Samaritans was one of constant hostility. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be second-class 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. Consequently, the relations between Jews and Samaritans were especially difficult during Jesus’ time. 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—the same powerful emotion that moved Jesus to ministry, feeding the hungry and healing the sick, when He saw the multitudes weary and scattered like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36–38, 14:14; Mark 8:2). The word “compassion” here comes from the Greek word splagchnizomai (splonk-NEED-zo-my) which means “to be moved in one’s gut, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion” (the guts—inward parts, entrails—were thought to be the seat of love and pity). Love, empathy, and mercy are motivated by the need of another, while withholding mercy is essentially an act of selfishness or self-protection. Jesus uses the story to contrast the lack of compassion shown by two members of the Jewish priesthood toward an unknown and unfortunate sufferer with the obedience to the law shown in practical compassion by the most unlikely of men, a Samaritan. Any Jew would be deeply humiliated for such an enemy of the Jews to show compassion to an injured Jew and pay expenses for his recuperation, while two Jewish religious officials did not. The story is not only to suggest that love can be found in unlikely places, but it 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 to cleanse and soothe the wounds, his bandage to bind them, and his own animal to carry the man. He also
used his own money to pay for his care at the inn, promising to pay for any further expenses the man’s care would require. In cultures like those of Africa, this Samaritan would be said to be a muntu—one who has ubuntu—and thus, is a person. The personhood of priest and the Levite would be 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. Jesus finishes the conversation by telling the lawyer, “Go and do likewise.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “Go and be a good neighbor; this is how you inherit eternal life.”

**Say It Correctly**

Compassion. com-PA-shun.

Empathy. em-pa-THEE.

Samaritan. sa-MARE-ih-tin.

Levite. LEE-vite.

Ubuntu. u-boon-TOO.

**Daily Bible Readings**

**MONDAY**

If You Wish To Be Perfect

(Matthew 19:16–22)

**TUESDAY**

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

(James 2:8–13)
WEDNESDAY
Keep the Instruction of Moses
(Matthew 23)

THURSDAY
Look to the Interests of Others
(Philippians 2:1–5)

FRIDAY
The First and Greatest Commandment
(Matthew 22:34–40)

SATURDAY
Live By The Spirit
(Galatians 5:10–17)

SUNDAY
Who is My Neighbor
(Luke 10:25–34)