

Neighbors?
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Luke 10:25-37

Questions were a vital part of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus knew the value of asking good questions to help people understand the truth. *"Who do YOU say that I am? (Remember last week?)" "Do you want to get well?" "Why are you so afraid?" "Why did you doubt?" "Do you still not understand?" "Peter, do you love me?"* and the fundamental question for all of us, *"Do you believe?"*

This morning's text in Luke 10 contains some compelling questions posed both by our Lord and by a "legal expert" seeking to discredit Jesus. Questions like: *"What should I do to inherit eternal life?" "What does the law of Moses say?" "Which of these three was the neighbor to the victim?" "Who IS my neighbor?"*

Here are questions we could ask ourselves as we read this familiar story about the "Good Samaritan:" *"Do I get the deeper message of this familiar account?" "Do I really love God with everything I am?" "If I do, am I living that out by showing mercy to others?" "Am I striving to become more like Jesus when it comes to loving others?"* The real question: *"Has my heart been changed by His Holy Spirit so I can live that way, or am I trying to do it in my own strength?"*

Big Idea: Followers of Christ demonstrate their love for God by extending mercy to others. When Jesus changes our heart and as we strive to be more like Him, the sometimes "hard task" of showing mercy will come more naturally as we do it in His strength.

Let's read our text and see what it says, what it means, and how it should change us this week.

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ 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. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.'³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

- Some translations call this man a "lawyer" or a "legal expert." Scripture makes it plain he was another scribe or Pharisee trying to trip Jesus up.
- He believed his heritage and keeping the Law of Moses equaled Heaven.
- That said, he asked the right question (even if with the wrong motive): "*What should I do to inherit eternal life?*" We might wonder if deep in his heart he may have had doubts about his "formula" for eternal life.
- Jesus responded to the legal expert by pointing to the law. "How do you read it?"
- The man responded with the familiar teaching from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19: "...[L]ove 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."
- New Testament scholars like us know what Jesus said about these two commands. Another "scribe" asked, "*Which commandment is the most important of all?*"²⁹ Jesus answered, "...[L]ove the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."³⁸ *This is the great and first commandment.*³⁹ *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*⁴⁰ *On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*" (Mt 22:37–40).ⁱ
- This legal expert was in sync with Jesus' teaching (sort of) so Jesus gave him credit for his response. "*You're right, now go do this and you will live!*"
- Wait a minute! Was Jesus saying you can earn your way into Heaven? No, that would contradict His role as the Sacrifice for the sin of mankind.
- What was Jesus really telling this man? The Amplified Bible gives us a clue: "...*do this habitually and you will live.*" We'll come back to this point.
- Verse 29: The legal expert tried to divert Jesus with a definition of terms: "*Who is my neighbor?*" The verse says the man was trying to "justify" himself. What does that mean? The Message paraphrase says he was "Looking for a loophole." Instead of admitting that he wasn't meeting the high standard of the two commands and asking for Jesus' help, the lawyer tried to narrow the focus of which neighbors qualify for our mercy.
- We can speculate that he thought the command only applied to showing mercy to people he liked, people like him. Jesus' reply would be shocking.
- That shocking reply was wrapped in a real-life story; a parable.
- Let's talk about parables.
- John MacArthur's simple definition is, "...[A] parable is an ingeniously simple word picture illuminating a profound spiritual lesson."ⁱⁱ
- Jesus use of parables wasn't just a "storytelling" technique for teaching.
- MacArthur: "*By His own testimony, the main reason Jesus suddenly adopted the parabolic style had more to do with hiding the truth from hard-*

*hearted unbelievers than explaining the truth to simple-minded disciples.*ⁱⁱⁱ

- He revealed the meaning to those who believed in Him as Messiah.
- Parables were not an allegory like “Pilgrim’s Progress.” We shouldn’t try to find symbolic meaning in them [i.e. the victim = sinners, Jesus = the Good Samaritan, the inn = the church, etc.] Take Jesus’ parables at face value!
- Back to our crime drama: The seventeen miles from Jerusalem to Jericho was dangerous and violent crime was rampant.
- The priest and the Levite obviously represent “church people” who should have been the FIRST to show mercy because of their love of God.
- Instead of “first responders” they were the “worst responders.” *“This looks dangerous so let’s just act like we didn’t see it.”* But Jesus said they DID see the man and they crossed the street!
- We might be sympathetic to them imagining excuses for not stopping and helping. Showing mercy can be messy and dangerous. If it were easy we wouldn’t need the love of Christ and the power of His Spirit living in us.
- The real shock of Jesus’ story was the hero. Warren Wiersbe writes, *“By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus disarmed the Jews, for the Jews and Samaritans were enemies (John 4:9; 8:48)”*^{iv}
- What do we know about Samaritans? *“The people of Samaria were of mixed Israelite and foreign descent, so the Jewish people did not accept them as part of the Jewish community (see note on John 4:9)...The Samaritans worshiped Yahweh and used a version of the Pentateuch as their Scripture, but they worshipped on Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. Thus the Samaritans were despised by Jews for both ethnic and religious reasons; there was mutual hatred by the Samaritans toward Jews.”*^v
- How dare Jesus tell this self-righteous Jew that a terrible Samaritan was a better role model for mercy giving than the religious elite of the day!
- The Samaritan engaged in a personal way. It is one thing to say you “love your neighbor as yourself,” but the man in the story put his time, his personal safety, and his money on the line. He literally got his hands dirty.
- Darrel Bock: *“The one major difference between the priest and Levite on the one hand and the Samaritan on the other is not what they see and hear, but what they do with what they see and hear. Only the Samaritan takes pity. Only he has a heart. Neighbors are people with a heart that does more than pump blood. It sees, feels, and serves.”*^{vi}
- Sometimes we’re intimidated about getting involved because the needs are overwhelming. Quoting Bock again, *“Maybe I cannot help everywhere, but I can help somewhere...Being a neighbor does not require meeting every need of which I become aware, but of becoming one piece of a large puzzle that helps meaningfully in a specific context.”*^{vii}
- The fact that I can’t help everyone shouldn’t stop me from helping someone.
- Jesus asked, *“Which of the three was the neighbor to the victim?”*
- The lawyer had no choice but to reply: *“The one who showed mercy.”*
- Jesus ended simply by saying to him and us, *“Go and do likewise.”*

- Did the lawyer do likewise? Scripture doesn't tell us.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The Life Application Study Bible points out: *“To the lawyer the wounded man was a subject to discuss. To the thieves the wounded man was someone to use and exploit. To the religious men the wounded man was a problem to be avoided...To the Samaritan the wounded man was a human being worth being cared for and loved. To Jesus all of them and all of us were worth dying for.”*^{viii}
- So, the moral of the story is: Do a better job of showing mercy and compassion to those in need, right? Yes, but, there is a deeper meaning.
- Jesus wasn't just urging the lawyer to be a better humanitarian. He was confronting him with the fact that none of us will show mercy at the level of God's standard unless we've experienced a transformation of the heart.
- That transformation only comes by trusting Christ as Savior and Lord.
- John MacArthur: *“Why did Jesus not preach the gospel rather than the law to this man? Jesus was simply holding the mirror of the law up to this legal “expert” to demonstrate how the law condemned him. If the lawyer were an honest man, he ought to have acknowledged that he did not love God as he should; he didn't even love his neighbors as he should.”*^{ix}
- Here is how I would sum it up: Being a follower of Christ requires loving God with everything we are. A true follower of Christ we will love others like we love ourselves and, more importantly, like Jesus loves them.
- Here's the rub: We can't love God and others the way Jesus commanded equipped with the heart we received at birth. Loving God and others at the radical level Jesus taught requires a new heart and that only comes from trusting Christ as Savior and Lord. That's also how we inherit eternal life!
- In that sense, the example of the “Good Samaritan” is a call to trust Christ.
- What about those of us who HAVE received Jesus' free gift of salvation? How should we respond to this lesson from Luke?
- Our mission this week is to ask Jesus to help us grow to be more like Him so we CAN love God and others in this radical way. Let's spend some time in prayer with that goal on our heart so we CAN “go and do likewise!”

ⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 22:37–40). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ MacArthur, John F.. *Parables: The Mysteries of God's Kingdom Revealed Through the Stories Jesus Told* (p. xxvi). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 212). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^v Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 10:33). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

^{vi} Bock, Darrell L.. Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (p. 302). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^{vii} *ibid*

^{viii} Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 122734-122744). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

^{ix} MacArthur, John F.. Parables: The Mysteries of God's Kingdom Revealed Through the Stories Jesus Told (p. 79). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.