

The Parables of Jesus, Teacher's Guide

Week 2: Loving Your Neighbor

Luke 10:25–37

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson carries more doctrinal weight than its familiarity might suggest. At its center stand the two great commands that summarize the whole will of God: wholehearted love for God and love for neighbor as oneself. Jesus binds these together so tightly that John can later say flatly that anyone who claims to love God while hating his brother is a liar (1 John 4:20). The lesson also touches the relationship between love, obedience, and eternal life. The lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus says, “Do this, and you will live.” Handle that carefully. It is not a charter for earning salvation by good deeds, and yet it utterly rules out the idea that a real faith can coexist with a settled refusal to love. The faith that saves is a faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6).

Notice too what Jesus exposes in the lawyer. The man wanted to “justify himself,” to draw the circle of obligation small enough that he could be confident he had kept the command. That instinct lives in all of us, and it is the quiet enemy of genuine love. So this parable is not finally about defining a neighbor; it is about becoming one. Jesus refuses the lawyer’s request for a boundary and instead enlarges the heart until the only question left is, “To whom can I show mercy?”

Aim, then, at both the head and the heart. Make sure your class understands what God actually requires and how love relates to the life of faith. But do not let the hour stay theological and safe. The whole thrust of the parable is downward, into the dust of the road, toward the specific wounded person each student will pass this week. Send them home not with a tidy definition of neighbor but with a name and a deed. The goal is not that they admire the Samaritan, but that they go and do likewise.

Question 1

Student Question:

When the lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus leads him to the two great commands: love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (vv. 27–28). Why does Jesus treat these two commands as the summary of all that God requires, and what does it tell us that love for God and love for neighbor are bound together and cannot be separated?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the two great commands, because everything in this passage hangs on them. The lawyer himself supplies the answer, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, and Jesus commends him: he has read the Law rightly. The whole of God's moral will can be gathered under two headings, love for God and love for neighbor. Elsewhere Jesus says that on these two commands "depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:40). Help your students feel the weight of that. God is not after mere external compliance with a list of rules; He is after love, the orientation of the whole person toward Him and toward others.

Press on the word "all." We are to love God with heart, soul, strength, and mind, which is to say with everything we are, holding nothing back. This is the first and great command, and it must stay first. Love for neighbor is not a substitute for love for God; it flows from it. A person who tried to love neighbors while ignoring God would have cut the flower from its root.

Then show why Jesus binds the two commands together so they cannot be pried apart. Love for the God we cannot see proves itself in love for the neighbor we can. This is exactly the logic John presses in 1 John 4:20: the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. The vertical and the horizontal are joined. You cannot keep the first command while trampling the second.

Bring it home. For people who have grown up in church, religion can quietly shrink to attendance, doctrine, and personal morality, all good things, while the second great command goes unattended. This question reopens the whole purpose of the Christian life. God's aim for us is love, and a faith that does not produce love for actual people has misunderstood what God requires.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The two great commands as the summary of God's whole will (Matthew 22:34–40)
- The inseparable unity of love for God and love for neighbor (1 John 4:20–21)
- Wholehearted love for God as the first and greatest command
- Love as the heart of true religion, not external compliance only
- The danger of reducing faith to doctrine and attendance while neglecting love

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus treat love, rather than rule-keeping, as the summary of God's will?
- How does love for God actually show itself in love for the people around us?
- Where is it possible to be religiously busy and yet fail the second great command?

Question 2

Student Question:

The lawyer wanted a definition of “neighbor” that would let him love within safe limits. Be honest about your own heart: who are the people or kinds of people you quietly exclude from your circle of love, and what reasons have you been giving yourself for keeping them outside it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and it asks students to do what the lawyer would not: name the people they have quietly placed outside the circle of love. The goal is honesty, not guilt for its own sake. Everyone has a category, the people who are hard to love because of how they have acted, what they believe, where they come from, or simply because loving them would be inconvenient.

Help the group see that we rarely exclude people openly. We do it with reasons that sound fair. They brought it on themselves. They are not really my responsibility. Someone else is better positioned to help. The lawyer’s “who is my neighbor?” is alive and well in those reasons, and part of the work of this question is to bring them into the light.

Move gently toward repentance rather than mere confession. It is one thing to admit we have drawn a small circle; it is another to begin redrawing it. Encourage students to hold one excluded person before God and ask Him to change how they see that person. Naming is the first step; the rest of the parable will press toward action.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest self-examination about whom we exclude from love
- The subtle reasons we use to justify withholding compassion
- Repentance as a change of heart toward people, not only an admission
- Seeing people as God sees them rather than through our preferences

Discussion Prompts

- Who are the people you find it hardest to count as neighbors, and why?
- What reasons have you used to keep certain people outside your circle of care?
- What might change if you asked God to let you see one of them as He does?

Question 3

Student Question:

Luke says the lawyer asked “who is my neighbor?” because he was “desiring to justify himself” (v. 29). What does this reveal about the human tendency to shrink God’s commands down to something manageable, and why is the desire to justify ourselves so often the enemy of genuine love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question goes to the motive Luke exposes. The lawyer asks for a definition of neighbor not out of curiosity but “desiring to justify himself.” He wants assurance that he has already kept the command, and to get it he needs the command made small. If neighbor means only my own people, my own circle, then I can be confident I have loved enough. The instinct to justify ourselves almost always works by shrinking God’s demands down to a size we have already met.

Teach this as a universal human tendency, not merely a first-century lawyer’s flaw. We do the same thing whenever we redefine a command so that it conveniently excludes the very situation we are in. Honesty about this is liberating, because the gospel never asks us to justify ourselves. We are justified by God’s grace through an obedient faith, not by proving we have already met the standard.

Show why self-justification is the enemy of love. Love does not ask, “How little can I get away with?” It asks, “Who needs me?” The moment we are busy defending ourselves, we stop being available to the person in the ditch. The lawyer’s self-justifying question and the Samaritan’s self-giving mercy are exact opposites.

Land the point pastorally. The cure for self-justification is not more striving but a heart that has stopped keeping score, freed by grace to love generously because it is no longer anxiously defending its own record. Help students see that grace, far from excusing a small love, is precisely what frees us for a large one.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-justification as the instinct to shrink God’s commands to a manageable size
- Justification by God’s grace through obedient faith, not by proving our own record (Romans 3:23–24)
- The contrast between defending ourselves and being available to love
- Grace as the freedom that releases us for generous love

Discussion Prompts

- How do we shrink God’s commands so we can feel we have already kept them?
- Why does the need to justify ourselves get in the way of loving others?
- How does resting in God’s grace actually free us to love more, not less?

Question 4

Student Question:

The priest and the Levite both saw the wounded man and “passed by on the other side” (vv. 31–32). When you think back over recent weeks, where have you seen a need and crossed to the other side of the road? What was it, busyness, fear, inconvenience, discomfort, that moved you to keep walking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the priest and the Levite and turns the mirror toward the student. Both men saw the wounded traveler, and both crossed to the far side of the road. Jesus does not tell us their inner reasoning, which leaves room for honest reflection on our own. We pass by for ordinary reasons: we are in a hurry, we are afraid, it would be messy, we tell ourselves someone else will handle it.

Encourage specificity. Vague admissions (“I guess I could do more”) do not lead to change. A concrete memory does (“Last month I saw the need and convinced myself I was too busy”). The aim is not to wallow but to recognize the pattern so it can be interrupted next time.

Be sensitive in the room. Some students carry real guilt over a time they failed to help. Receive that honestly without piling on. The point of the question is not condemnation but awakening, so that the next time a need appears, they notice the impulse to cross the road and choose differently.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to see a need and avoid it
- Common barriers to mercy: hurry, fear, inconvenience, the assumption someone else will act
- Self-awareness as the first step toward changed behavior
- Conviction that awakens rather than merely condemns

Discussion Prompts

- When have you seen a need and crossed to the other side of the road?
- Which barrier most often stops you: hurry, fear, inconvenience, or something else?
- What would help you notice and resist that impulse the next time it comes?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus deliberately makes the two who fail the religious insiders, the priest and the Levite, and the one who helps a despised Samaritan (vv. 31–33). What is Jesus teaching about the difference between religious profession and the love God actually requires, and why is it possible to be busy with sacred duties and still ignore a suffering person right in front of us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus chose his characters with care, and the choice is part of the message. The two who fail are a priest and a Levite, the very men whose lives were devoted to the worship of God. The one who succeeds is a Samaritan, a member of a people the Jews regarded as religiously corrupt and

socially beneath them. Jesus is making a pointed contrast between religious credentials and actual love.

Explore why the religious men might have passed by. Perhaps they feared ceremonial defilement from a body that might be dead; perhaps they were preoccupied with temple duties; perhaps they simply did not want the trouble. Whatever the reason, Jesus shows that sacred busyness is no substitute for mercy. It is entirely possible to be occupied with holy things and still walk past a suffering human being.

This is a searching word for church people. We can be doctrinally sound, faithful in attendance, and active in good programs, and still fail the person bleeding in front of us. Religion that does not produce mercy has missed its purpose. As the prophets thundered and James echoed, God desires mercy, and pure religion visits the afflicted in their distress (Hosea 6:6; James 1:27).

Be careful to make the point without cynicism toward the church or its worship. Jesus is not against priests or temples; He is against a religion that stops at the sanctuary door. The aim is not to make students suspicious of devotion but to insist that true devotion overflows into love for people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between religious profession and the love God requires
- Mercy as central to true religion (Hosea 6:6; James 1:27)
- The danger of letting sacred duties crowd out compassion
- Sound doctrine and faithful attendance as no substitute for love in action
- Worship that overflows into mercy rather than stopping at the sanctuary

Discussion Prompts

- How can someone be busy with good religious activity and still ignore a person in need?
- Why do you think Jesus made the religious leaders the ones who failed?
- What does it look like for our worship to actually overflow into mercy?

Question 6

Student Question:

The Samaritan's mercy cost him something real: his oil and wine, his animal, his time, his money, and his plans (vv. 34–35). What would it actually cost you to love the neighbor God has put in your path, and are you willing to pay it? Name one specific price you sense the Lord asking you to pay this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the parable presses on cost, and this self-focused question asks students to count it. The Samaritan's mercy was not a warm feeling; it was a series of expensive actions. He used his own oil and wine, the first aid of the ancient world. He put the man on his own animal and walked. He paid the innkeeper two days' wages and pledged to cover any overage. Love, in this story, has a price tag.

Help students translate this into their own lives. What would it actually cost to love the neighbor God has put before them? It might be money, but more often it is time, convenience, emotional energy, or the willingness to be inconvenienced and interrupted. Real love almost always costs something, and the unwillingness to pay is usually why we pass by.

Then push for one concrete price. The question is deliberately pointed: name a specific cost you are willing to pay this week. Vague generosity changes nothing; a definite commitment, a sum of money, an afternoon, a hard phone call, begins to make us into Samaritans rather than admirers of one.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The costliness of genuine love (time, money, convenience, energy)
- Mercy as action that pays a price, not sentiment that pays nothing
- Willingness to be interrupted and inconvenienced for the sake of others
- Counting the cost and choosing to pay it

Discussion Prompts

- What would it actually cost you to love the neighbor in front of you?
- Which is harder for you to give: your money, your time, or your emotional energy?
- What is one specific price you are willing to pay this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The Samaritan crossed a deep barrier of ethnic and religious hostility to help a man who would likely have despised him (v. 33). What does this teach us about the reach of Christlike love, and how does it confront the ways we limit our compassion to people who are like us or who can repay us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws out the most striking feature of the parable: the helper is a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans shared a long, bitter hostility, religious and ethnic. For Jesus to make a Samaritan the hero, and to imply that the wounded man (almost certainly a Jew) owed his life to one, was startling. Love, Jesus teaches, leaps over the very walls we are most sure are permanent.

Note that the Samaritan helped someone who, in ordinary circumstances, would likely have despised him. He expected no thanks, no repayment, no social benefit. This is love that does not calculate return. It confronts our habit of confining compassion to people who are like us, who belong to our group, or who can do something for us in return.

Connect this to the wider teaching of Jesus, who tells us to love even enemies and to do good expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:32–36). The reach of Christlike love is defined not by the worth or likeness of the recipient but by the heart of God, who sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

Apply it concretely. Ask where the walls run in your students' lives, political, racial, social, familial, and what it would mean for mercy to cross them. The parable will not let us love only our own.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christlike love that crosses barriers of ethnicity, hostility, and class
- Love that expects no repayment or benefit (Luke 6:32–36)
- The breadth of God's love as the pattern for ours (Matthew 5:43–48)
- Confronting the human habit of loving only those like us

Discussion Prompts

- What walls in your life is mercy least likely to cross, and why?
- How does loving without expecting repayment change the way we help people?
- Who is a modern equivalent of the Samaritan, an unlikely person showing us up in love?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus measures love not by the Samaritan's feelings but by what he actually did: he stopped, bound the wounds, carried the man, paid the bill (vv. 34–35). Where in your life is your love mostly a matter of warm intentions that never quite become action? What is one concrete deed of mercy you could do, not merely feel, this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns attention from the size of our love to its reality. Jesus describes the Samaritan entirely in verbs: he came, he saw, he had compassion, he went to him, he bound, he poured, he set him on his animal, he brought him, he took care of him, he paid. Love here is not measured by emotion but by what got done. The priest and Levite may well have felt a pang of pity; the difference is that the Samaritan acted.

Many sincere believers have hearts full of good intentions that rarely become deeds. We mean to call, to visit, to give, to forgive, and the meaning to never quite arrives. This is the gap John targets when he says we must love “not in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18), and James when he describes the faith that sends a hungry person away with a blessing but no food (James 2:15–16).

Move students toward one concrete deed. The question asks for something they could do, not merely feel, this week. Encourage them to choose something small and specific enough to actually happen. A real act of mercy, however modest, does more to form the heart than a grand intention that never lands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love defined by action, not merely by feeling or intention (1 John 3:18)
- The gap between good intentions and actual deeds
- Faith that acts versus faith that only wishes well (James 2:15–16)
- Small, concrete deeds of mercy as the training ground of love

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your love mostly intention that never becomes action?
- What keeps good intentions from turning into deeds?
- What is one concrete act of mercy you could actually complete this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

The lawyer’s opening question was, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” and Jesus answered, “Do this, and you will live” (vv. 25, 28). How does this passage relate love and obedience to eternal life without teaching that we earn salvation by our good deeds, and without the opposite error that genuine faith can exist while we refuse to love our neighbor?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinally weightiest question of the lesson, and it deserves careful handling. The whole exchange is framed by the lawyer’s opening question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” and Jesus’ reply, “Do this, and you will live.” At first glance this can sound like salvation by good deeds, as if eternal life were the wage earned by a sufficiently loving life. Help your students avoid that conclusion without overcorrecting into the opposite error.

First, set the scene rightly. This conversation takes place under the law, with a lawyer who asks a law question, and Jesus meets him on that ground. The law did indeed promise life to the one who kept it perfectly (Leviticus 18:5). But the very point of the encounter is that the lawyer

cannot keep it; that is why he scrambles to justify himself by narrowing the command. The law, fully understood, drives us to see our need, not our adequacy.

Second, state the gospel clearly. No one is saved by accumulating enough good deeds to earn eternal life. Salvation is God's gift, received by grace through an obedient faith: hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus as Lord, repenting, confessing Him, and being baptized into Christ, then living faithfully (Ephesians 2:8–10; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26–27). We do not love our neighbor in order to purchase heaven.

Third, refuse the opposite error just as firmly. The fact that we are not saved by works does not mean love is optional. Jesus says, "Do this, and you will live," and He means it. The faith that saves is never a bare, fruitless belief; it is a faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 2:10). A professed faith that looks at a wounded neighbor and walks by is the very kind of dead faith James warns cannot save (James 2:14–17). So love is not the price of eternal life, but it is the inevitable mark of those who truly have it.

Help students hold the two truths together. We are saved by grace, not by deeds of mercy; and the grace that saves us produces a life of mercy. The parable does not let us choose between grace and obedience. It binds them, just as it binds love for God to love for neighbor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation as God's gift by grace through obedient faith, not earned by good deeds (Ephesians 2:8–10; Acts 2:38)
- The law's demand exposing our need rather than proving our adequacy (Leviticus 18:5; Romans 3:20)
- Genuine, saving faith as a faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6)
- The error of faith-only: a fruitless faith that ignores the neighbor cannot save (James 2:14–17)
- Love as the necessary mark of saving faith, not its purchase price
- Holding grace and obedience together rather than choosing between them

Discussion Prompts

- How would you answer someone who reads "do this and you will live" as salvation by good works?
- Why is it equally wrong to say that love for neighbor is optional for a Christian?
- How does grace produce a life of mercy rather than excuse the lack of it?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the parable. Jesus ends not with a definition to memorize but with a command to obey: "You go, and do likewise" (v. 37). Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you

through this story. Who is the one neighbor He is calling you to stop for, and what will you actually do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers up the whole parable and presses it toward a single, concrete response, exactly as Jesus did. He did not end with a definition for the lawyer to file away; He ended with a command: “You go, and do likewise.” Keep your class on that note. The danger with a beloved, familiar parable is that we admire it and change nothing.

It can help to walk back through the story as a prompt. Whom have you been passing by? What boundary has your love refused to cross? What deed has stayed stuck at the level of intention? Then narrow it to one neighbor and one action. Specificity is what turns a moving story into a changed life.

Close by reminding students that the goal of this study is formation, not information. We are not here merely to understand the Good Samaritan; we are here to become one. Invite each person to name the neighbor and the deed, and let the group pray for the courage and follow-through to actually go and do likewise before you meet again.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at obedience and transformation, not admiration
- Moving from understanding the parable to imitating it
- Naming one specific neighbor and one specific deed of mercy
- The Christian life as becoming a neighbor, not merely defining one

Discussion Prompts

- Who is the one neighbor Jesus is calling you to stop for right now?
- What specific deed will you actually do, and when?
- How can this group encourage you to follow through before we meet again?