

The Parables of Jesus

Week 2: Loving Your Neighbor -- Luke 10:25–37

A lawyer rises to his feet in the crowd. He is an expert in the law of Moses, a man who has spent his life parsing fine distinctions, and he has a question for the young teacher from Nazareth. It is not really a question; it is a test. “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus, as He so often does, answers a question with a question, turning the man back to the book he knows so well. “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” The lawyer answers beautifully, stitching together two commands: love the Lord your God with everything you are, and love your neighbor as yourself. “You have answered correctly,” Jesus says. “Do this, and you will live.” And there the conversation could have ended, except that the lawyer cannot leave it alone.

Luke tells us exactly why he presses on. The man, “desiring to justify himself,” asks one more question: “And who is my neighbor?” It is the question of someone looking for a boundary line, a fence he can stand safely behind. Surely the command does not mean everyone. Surely there is a limit, a category of people he is allowed to leave outside the circle of his love. And so Jesus, instead of giving him a definition, tells him a story, because a story can slip past our defenses in a way a definition never can.

A man is traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a notorious seventeen-mile descent through rocky wilderness where robbers waited. They fall on him, strip him, beat him, and leave him half dead in the ditch. Then, one by one, help seems to arrive. A priest comes down the road, sees the man, and passes by on the other side. A Levite, a temple servant, does exactly the same. These are the religious professionals, the very men you would expect to stop, and they do not. Then comes a Samaritan, a member of a people the Jews despised and avoided, and he is the one who stops. He kneels in the dirt, pours out his own oil and wine on the wounds, lifts the stranger onto his own animal, walks him to an inn, and pays the bill out of his own pocket, promising to cover whatever else is owed.

When the story is finished, Jesus flips the lawyer’s question on its head. The man had asked, “Who is my neighbor?” hoping to narrow the field. Jesus asks instead, “Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” The lawyer cannot even bring himself to say the word Samaritan. He answers, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus says the words that have echoed down twenty centuries: “You go, and do likewise.” Read this parable slowly, and be warned. It will not let you ask who deserves your love. It will only ask whether you will be a neighbor to the next broken person God puts in your path.

Group Discussion: The lawyer wanted to know where the boundary line was, who counted as his neighbor and who did not, so that he could love within safe limits. We do the same thing in quieter ways. Who are the people we tend to leave outside the circle of our care, and what

reasons do we give ourselves for passing by on the other side? Why do you think Jesus refuses to give the lawyer a tidy definition and tells him a story instead?

Personal Reflection: Picture the road you travel every week, your ordinary routes through work, family, errands, and church. Who is the person lying in your ditch right now, the one whose need you have noticed and quietly stepped around? What has made it easier to keep walking than to stop?

Read Luke 10:25–37

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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.
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Leviticus 19:18, the ancient command to love your neighbor as yourself, which Jesus draws upon here; Matthew 22:34–40, the two great commands on which all the Law and the Prophets hang; 1 John 3:16–18, love that shows itself in deed and truth rather than in word alone; James 2:14–17, the emptiness of a faith that sees a brother in need and does nothing; Galatians 6:9–10, doing good to all people as we have opportunity, especially to the household of faith.