
Life on Mission: Who Is My Neighbor?

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Introduction

One of the problems that we face as we talk about living on mission, is that when we watch the news or look out into our culture that has seemingly lost its collective mind... it's easy to feel the pull to retreat, protect ourselves, our families, our kids from all of it. When you read or hear about the endless problems in our society or read about some of the horrible things that people do to each other... it can make us wary of people we don't know or don't have relationship with. It can even make us skeptical of the people we DO know, let alone the people we don't.

Where we're going in the series is not to nudge into unwise decision making regarding your relationships and friendships. But it is to say this: **As Christians, we're not called to retreat, or to hide, or to flee in fear... but to wisely and discerningly press into the MISSION God's placed us here to accomplish.**

Luke 10:25-37

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."

GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS OUR OBJECTIONS PRACTICAL APPLICATION

God's Instructions

The first thing that happens in the passage is a "law expert" seeks to trap Jesus by asking him this question, "What do I have to do to be saved?"

And when you and I hear "lawyer," we think civil law... but this is an expert in the *Hebrew religious law*.

Why would this religious law expert want to trap Jesus? Jesus was really disrupting things in the religious world because Jesus was constantly welcoming and being hospitable toward people who were constantly disobeying the moral law. Jesus is being kind, gentle, generous, gracious toward the type of people that the “religious folks” would look down on because they weren’t “obeying” the law of God.

This lawyer wanted to expose Jesus as being someone who didn’t really respect the law of God, or the importance of the moral law. So, when the lawyer asks the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life – to be saved by God?” he fully expects Jesus to say something like, *“It doesn’t really matter how you live; God just accepts everyone no matter what... just go to God and he’ll accept and love you.”*

He’s doing His best to trap Jesus, but Jesus has a trap of His own...

Jesus says, “Well, you tell me... how do you read it?” In other words, what’s your summary of it?”

The lawyer quotes the Shema, what we looked at last week...

Luke 10:27

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.”*

- And Jesus says, “You’re right. Just go and do that and you’ll be saved.”

Now think, this is what Jesus told this guy: *“Love God so much that He infiltrates every area of your life. So that in every circumstance you’re totally content because you have all your needs met by Him, and He’s what you desire most. And then, love your neighbor, meet the needs of your neighbor with all the focus, energy, determination, attention that you use to meet your own needs. Love them with all the discipline that you love yourself with... if you’ll just do that, then you’ll be saved...”*

- Do you feel the enormity of the moral mountain Jesus is painting?

The lawyer knows he’s being painted into a corner... the scripture says this...

Luke 10:29

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

He’s saying, *“Now hold on a minute... let’s be reasonable here... this is the summary of the 613 individual Hebraic laws... you don’t mean anybody do you? Who exactly is my neighbor? Because I love people... well... certain people... but you don’t expect me to love ALL people, do you? Especially not sinners! Or people that aren’t as moral as I am! Or people who don’t look like me, or act like me, or believe like me... certainly you don’t mean everyone?”*

Before we say, *“Oh how selfish. How could this lawyer act like that!?”*

- Jesus isn’t just going after this lawyer’s problem... He’s pointing out the HUMAN problem, because whether you believe it or not, whether you like it or not, WE ALL DO THIS!
- For example, I guarantee you... someone in this room, after last Sunday’s message went home thinking, *“Well, Jesus didn’t mean my literal neighbor! He meant, you know, everybody. And if He means everybody than I don’t really have to be intentional with anybody.”* If that’s you, you’re doing exactly what the lawyer did!

Because if God's command to love my neighbor means to love a vague, ambiguous, if it's a generic "everyone," then I can't really be held accountable for it, and I can therefore, "justify myself" just like this lawyer.

And Jesus says, "That reminds me of a story..."

Our Objections

Jesus paints the lawyer and us into a very uncomfortable corner... He removes our excuses.

Luke 10:30-33

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.

There is a traveler who fell among robbers, most likely Jewish, then you have these two professional church people "the priest" and the "Levite."

- The irony of Jesus putting a priest and a Levite into this story is that it was their job to help those in need! To distribute alms to the poor, so what happened here?

BACKGROUND:

The road Jesus is referring to in this story is a 17-mile stretch from Jerusalem to Jericho. There was a portion of that road called the "Way of Blood," because on this particular stretch of the road, people would regularly be beaten and robbed, just like the traveler in our story. So, Jesus is very clearly referring to something that happened on a regular basis, and certainly something the lawyer would know about.

Why didn't the priest and Levite not only *not* help this man, but pass by on the other side of the road?

1. **They're smart.** *Why would robbers leave a man half dead and dying on the side of the road?* Potentially to lure some unsuspecting do-gooder to help him so they can rob them too. So, the Priest and the Levite are thinking, "I'm not that stupid. I'm not falling for it."
2. The other reason is this... *if you help others out of religious obligation, because you're trying to be moral... or you feel guilty for not helping... as soon as it costs you something, you'll bail.*
 - a. **Religious obligation or morality born of self-effort doesn't give you the power to sacrifice for others in need.** As soon as helping someone else means risking our own comfort, or convenience, often our "religious obligations" fly out the window because even though we know we should, it just costs us too much.

But here comes the Samaritan, who were hated by the Jews because of their mixed bloodline with the Gentiles. The Samaritans hated the Jews just as much in return.

When the Samaritan stops... he is risking EVERYTHING! It is an incredible sacrifice. Some might even say, irresponsible, naïve... stupid. The Samaritan stays with him, binds up His wounds, takes him to an inn, covers all his expenses... shows unbelievable generosity and care toward a man that DESPISES his own people.

Then Jesus says to the lawyer, “Which one was the neighbor?” The lawyer couldn’t even say the word *Samaritan*.... He says, “The one who showed mercy!”

A neighbor is anyone you encounter with a need.

Regardless of race, culture, creed, locale, status, or position — whether or not they look like you, believe like you, think like you, act like you, agree with you, align with you in any way whatsoever.

However, while the point of this story tells us that your neighbor isn’t JUST your literal neighbor... it most definitely doesn’t EXCLUDE your literal neighbor. Can you imagine Jesus saying... “*Listen, I want you all to go out and love all people, but don’t you dare love your actual neighbors!*”

What are some of our objections to this?

ACCOUNTABILITY

The interesting thing in this story is that the priest and the Levite passed by on the opposite side of the road. They could have just stepped over the guy. Or just skirted around him. Why make a point to go so far around their fellow Jew who needed their help?

- *I just imagine them walking by, refusing to look back across the road going, “I don’t see anything. I see nothing. No one is half dead over there. That’s ridiculous. Do you see anything? Me? No. I don’t see anything. Good. I’m glad we all agree that nothing is happening over there and neither of us see anything.”*
- ***They avoided the problem, so they wouldn’t be accountable for solving the problem. They didn’t want to be looked down upon for NOT solving the problem, so they just avoided it.***

When it comes to our day-to-day lives, some of us avoid our neighbors because our lives don’t actually reflect the Jesus that we claim to follow. Maybe we gossip too much... or we disparage our coworkers... or my neighbors might see me yelling at my dogs more often than I’d like.

1. We need to invite the Holy Spirit to help us work on those areas of sin, or those things in our lives that aren’t yet sanctified, that are so ingrained and easy to fall back into.
2. But those things shouldn’t stop us from knowing and loving our neighbors, because if you wait until you’re perfect, you’ll never live on mission.
3. Often it’s KNOWING that the people around you are looking to YOU to catch a glimpse of Jesus, that helps you root out those things that God wants to deal with because how you live matters! What you do and say matters!!

SELF-PROTECTION

It’s easy to make judgments about people you don’t really know. It’s easy to lump people into a category without ever doing the work of getting to know them. We all do this to an extent, what I’ve found to be the most prevalent reason is self-protection. We isolate and often stereotype the people around us in order to protect ourselves from having to care, or taking the risk of being vulnerable.

- If we can write someone off as “not worthy” of our care, our love, our time... then we don’t have to take the risk of relationship, we don’t have to risk being rejected, or harmed in some way.
- It can be a scary thing taking emotional and relational risks for many different reasons, many of which are understandable and valid. We need to be wise, and discerning, and dependent on the Holy Spirit in these areas. But for clarity’s sake, there are some reasons NOT to move toward relationship with someone...

- History of Emotional/Physical/Sexual Abuse.
- Betrayal of confidence and breaking of trust.
- Patterns of intimidation, manipulation, or any form of threat.
 - All these scenarios are instances where clear relational boundaries need to be established. Because the truth is, you can still love the person... but you really need to love them from a distance without exposing yourself to further harm and abuse.

We must lean on Jesus to guide us in wisely and discerningly knowing when and how to move toward relationship with our neighbors.

RATIONALIZATION

Whenever someone around us has a need, we can easily say, “That’s their own fault. They created the problem, so they can solve it.” Or, like the religious leaders with the traveler on the side of the road, *“That man deserved it... he shouldn’t have been alone on that road anyway... they don’t deserve my help, I worked hard for what I have and they’re only in need because they’re either dumb, lazy or both.”*

Notice Jesus doesn’t tell us WHY this man is in this situation, whose fault it was, if he was wise or unwise... regardless of the reason... the man needed help.

ENTITLEMENT

We can say, *“I help people all the time! Why would I get intentional about loving people that live near me, then I have to be bothered by them! I just want to come home and not talk to anyone! I don’t want to be bothered, I don’t want to be a bother, I just don’t want to have to think about how I’m following (or not following) Jesus in my neighborhood!”*

OBJECTION: *“Now Rob, hold on just a second! I’m a single mom, or I have a family that needs my attention too... I don’t think I’m rationalizing or entitled; I just prioritize my family and I can’t possibly tend to the needs of all of my neighbors without abdicating my responsibility to care for and raise my family.”*

1. By no means should we give our family the shaft because we’re killing it “living on mission” or “loving our neighbors” so well! *Please don’t abdicate your responsibility to your family.*
 - a. *By no means can you meet ALL the needs of ALL your neighbors.*
2. What you CAN do is to know about their needs and pray for them, *and just meet the needs that you can meet.*
3. Now, let me offer you a different perspective on this too, because some of you are so relieved because you think I just gave you an out. Let me push you on this a little bit here... *What do you think it would be called when you include your children, your family, your spouse, your friends, your life group... when you INCLUDE them, and they are involved WITH YOU in loving your neighbors? What do you think that might be called? Discipleship.*

DISCIPLESHIP

You’re loving your neighbor WITH them, and you’re loving your neighbor FOR them. You’re modeling for your family what it looks like to fulfill what Jesus says is the greatest commandment!

- Loving your neighbors can just be a part of your normal rhythms WITH your family — not to the EXCLUSION of your family.

- When your children say, “*Do we HAVE to love our neighbors?*” what a perfect opportunity to teach them the beauty of the gospel. “*Jesus loved us while we were His enemies, He pursued relationship with us, and invites us to love others the way He’s loved us.*”

Now, this isn’t some legalistic, earn your salvation — this is a response to God’s generosity toward us.

Last week we were challenged simply to pray for our neighbors and pay attention to what doors God might open for us to move toward relationship. Today we’re going to add another tiny little step...

Practical Application



The box in the middle is your home. The other eight boxes are the homes closest to you. Maybe your neighborhood, or apartment building, or property doesn’t look like a tic-tac-toe board, but you get the point. Try to picture your eight nearest neighbors, (physical proximity).

1. Write the names of the people who live in the house represented by each box. First and last names if you can, if you can only remember first, that’s fine. If you don’t have a clue what their names are... make a note to find out.

If you don’t know the names of your neighbors, continue to pray for them; and this week, learn their names and write them down, and begin to pray for them.

But here’s the next few steps. After you write their names... get to know them and write down something relevant about them that you could only learn by talking with them.

- Not — they drive a blue car?
- How about, “They served in the military. Or they’re from California. They work in healthcare... something relevant.

As you get to know them more and more overtime, take note of a need that they’ve expressed to you. Or why they love their job. Or what they think about Jesus or the church? Something meaningful that’s a little bit more in depth.

Many of us, when we think about loving our enemies, like Jesus loved us — it is so challenging and stretching that we don't even know where to start... or how to live it out... it seems so big and so difficult...

But before God can teach us to love our enemies, or even learn to love our “metaphoric neighbors,” we need to start living on mission where we've been planted — in our own backyard.

What gives us the power, and the purity of motivation to do this?

The beautiful thing about the story of the Good Samaritan is that it's easy to see who each character represents. Many of us may read this and think, “I'm the good Samaritan.” And while we're to aspire to live like the example set for us in this story... what Jesus is revealing to this lawyer is this: you are *not* the Good Samaritan. I am. You're the traveler beaten half to death on the side of the road and I've come to lay down my life, my wealth, my convenience, my power, my privileges — so that you might be saved from certain death and eternal doom.

**When you see yourself as the traveler who was saved and served by Jesus Christ —
it frees you to love your neighbors with no strings attached.**

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the religious law expert want to trap Jesus?
2. Discuss the enormous moral mountain that the answer Jesus gave to him posed.
3. Did Jesus mean to love “everybody,” even your literal neighbors, and your enemies?
How do you personally perceive/receive this command?
4. Discuss, “A neighbor is anyone you encounter with a need.”
5. Print out and distribute the “Know Your Neighbors” Card.
How many names/info about your neighbors do you already know?
6. Will you commit this week to learn the names of your neighbors, get to know something relevant about them, and pray for them?

NOTES