

## FISHERS OF MEN // Serve Others

Over the last month, we've been talking what it means for us to respond to Jesus' invitation to become fishers of men. We recently shared some demographics that we're smack dab in the middle of 150,000 people that do not know Jesus and are not connected to any local church.

In different ways, each week, we've said that we're going to be a church that does whatever it takes to reach people that are far from God. Why? Because that's what Jesus did for us, and that's what we're going to do for others.

What we've tried to do in this series is get practical about what this can look like in our lives and what it means for each of us to take ownership of the calling to be fishers of men.

### B.L.E.S.S.

**B** - Begin with Prayer

**L** - Listen without Judgment

**E** - Eat Some Meals

**S** - **Serve Others**

**S** - Share Your Story

1. **Begin with prayer.** Before Jesus chose the original 12 disciples, he prayed all night long, and the Father directed Him. So, we're going to pray about WHO. And we're going to begin praying daily for at least one person that is far from God. Hopefully, you've been doing that faithfully throughout this series and will continue long after.
2. **Listen Without Judgment.** We're going to get curious about the people in our lives that don't know Jesus. We're going to ask questions, hear their story, maybe even hear some opinions or perspectives that we completely disagree with. And we're not going to condemn them for it. We're going to get curious, and we're going to know them and love them and wait on the Lord to open the door for spiritual conversations.
3. **Eat Some Meals.** Before I knew Jesus, a couple invited me over for dinner, and we had one conversation over a meal that changed the course of my life. Breaking bread with someone that is far from God is an easy way to love them right where they're at. Last week, Pastor Jimmy shared a story of someone that invited their neighbor to church, and they didn't show up. Then they invited them over to their home for dinner, and they jumped at the opportunity.

Today, we get to “serve others.” Now, it’s no mystery that Jesus served. He is the epitome of servant leadership. He led by lowering Himself. He descended from His throne in heaven, put on human flesh, walked among us, He wrapped a towel around His waist and washed His disciples’ feet. He even says about Himself...

**Matthew 20:28**, “...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (ESV)

In fact, right before Jesus said this, His followers were bickering about who will be the greatest in the Kingdom. The mother of James and John asked Jesus if they could sit at His right and left hand when He establishes His kingdom. James and John are all about it! Word got back to the other 10 apostles that they were maneuvering for power, and they were outraged! They couldn’t believe it! (And they were likely just upset that they hadn’t gotten to Jesus first.)

Then, Jesus calls everyone over for a literal “come to Jesus” meeting, and says,

**Matthew 20:25-26** “...‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant...’” (ESV)

I want us to look at a classic example that Jesus gives us out of Luke 10—the parable of the good Samaritan.

In this passage, Jesus encounters an expert in Hebrew Religious Law, and this lawyer tries to trap Jesus with a question. He asks, “*What do I have to do inherit eternal life?*”

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had taken notice that He was spending the majority of His time with who they considered to be “sinners” (people that were constantly breaking God’s moral law). So, the lawyer is asking this question expecting Jesus to say something like... “*Oh it doesn’t really matter how you live. God accepts everyone no matter what. You believe and live however you want. You do you. Go to God and he’ll be fine with whatever.*”

But that’s not what Jesus says. Jesus does the opposite! Through a question-asking sparring match, Jesus essentially tells this guy... “*If you want to be saved, you have to love God so much that He infiltrates every area of your life. So that in every circumstance you’re totally content because you have Him and He’s what you desire*

*most. And then, you have to love your neighbor, serve those around you, meet the needs of your neighbors with all the focus, energy, determination, attention that you use to meet your own needs. Love them with all the discipline and resources that you use love yourself. If you'll just do that, then you'll be saved."*

**Luke 10:29**, "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

*He's going, "Now hold on a minute. Let's be reasonable here. This is the summary of the 613 individual Hebraic laws... who can do this? And surely you don't mean love just anybody, do you? Who exactly is my neighbor? Because I love people... 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 think like me. Certainly, you don't mean everyone?"*

And all of a sudden, Jesus says, "You know, this reminds me of a story."

**Luke 10:30-37**, "...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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 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. 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." Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise.'" (ESV)

So, you have this traveler, who fell among robbers, most likely Jewish, and you have these two professional church people, "the priest" and the "Levite." Now, 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?

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 half to death 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.

So 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.** On this particular road, robbers would leave a man half dead and dying on the side of the road to lure some unsuspecting do-gooder to help him so they could rob them too. So, the Priest and the Levite are going, *"I'm not that stupid. I'm not falling for it."*
2. If our primary motive for helping others out of religious obligation, because we're trying to be moral, or we feel guilty for not, as soon as serving others costs us, we'll jump ship. We'll bail. As soon as helping someone else means sacrificing personally our time, our comfort, or convenience, often times, our "religious obligations" fly out the window because even though we know we should, we just don't want to pay the price.

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

But when the Samaritan stops, he risks EVERYTHING! It is an incredible sacrifice. Others would look in on this kind of compassion, and generosity, and sacrifice as irresponsible, naïve, and stupid, but the Samaritan does it anyway. He binds up his wounds, takes him to an inn, covers all his expenses, and shows unbelievable generosity and care toward a man that despised his own people.

And then Jesus, 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 few things I want us to notice about this Samaritan.

1. He was **prepared to serve.**

Notice the resources he had with him. He had bandages, oil, and wine for his wounds. He had an animal to help transport the man to safety. And he had money set aside to take of his expenses until he returned with more money to repay whatever extra costs there were to the innkeeper!

The Samaritan had some financial breathing room. He had resources that he was willing to spare for this man. He prepared in advance, so that when an opportunity came up to serve someone else in need, he was ready.

I wonder today how many of us are living beyond our limits? We have “just enough” to scrape by. Or we take whatever increases we gain in life to increase our standard of living rather than asking God how He might want us to use those resources to serve others in need?

As it relates to our finances, it's especially difficult with our current economic climate. Tennessee ranked among the worst inflation rates across the U.S. at 3.8% back in April. (<https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/local/2024/04/11/feeling-the-pinch-of-inflation-tennessee-ranks-among-worst-states/73288033007/#>)

Here's what I know about myself and about us. It's easy to come up with reasons to NOT be generous or not serve. It's easy to NOT set aside money or resources in order to help others, because what's right here for most of us, are all that things WE need help with!

I'm sure this Samaritan man had plenty of other things to do! He was going somewhere. He wouldn't have been traveling on that dangerous road unless he had to! But he created breathing room, margin, space, ahead of time with financial and material resources to be a blessing to anyone in need along the way.

What would it look like for you and I to prepare in advance to serve others with the resources God has given us? And preparing to serve or bless others for us likely won't mean saving a man's life on the side of the road. It might just simply mean serving or helping in some small, seemingly insignificant way.

Last summer, I learned how to build Adirondack chairs for a little fire pit in our backyard. Throughout the summer, I built six of them and ended up with some extra lumber. Around the same time, our neighbors, some of the sweetest people, who don't know the Lord, were putting in planters in their back yard but needed two more built to complete their project. So, I invited my neighbor over, and the two of us built the planters with the extra resources we had, hauled them over to his house, and they've got a sweet little garden going over there.

But the best part of that story is while we were building the planters, we struck up a conversation about his background, his story, where he grew up, and we ended up

talking about what we both do for a living and had a conversation about faith. We're praying for this family to come to Christ.

But preparing to serve, looking for opportunities to be a blessing to our neighbors, or others in need... just like sharing a meal serves as a bridge to relationship... serving the people around us builds an incredible relational bridge that may be the very thing that God uses to open the door to conversations about Jesus.

## 2. He made time to serve.

**EXAMPLE:** In 1973, social psychologists, John Darley and Daniel Batson conducted a study trying to determine why people help in some situations but not in others. The researchers asked 67 seminary students to deliver a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan. And right before it was time for them to walk to another building and deliver their sermon, the research assistant would say one of two things to the student.

1. *"Oh, I just got word, you're late! They were expecting you a few minutes ago. You'd better get moving."*
2. *"It'll be a few minutes before they're ready for you, but you might as well head on over."*

On their way to the building where they would deliver the sermon on the Good Samaritan, each student encountered a man slumped in a doorway with his eyes closed, coughing, and moaning, very clearly in distress. The researchers wanted to know how much a "hurried" or "unhurried" condition would affect who stopped to help this man.

Darley and Batson found that only...

10% of the students in the hurried condition stopped to help the man. In comparison, 63% of the students in the unhurried condition stopped to help the man.

In other words, being in a hurry can lead even a seminary student, about to preach a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan, to completely ignore a person on the side of the road in need! The Samaritan was going somewhere, but he had breathing room in his schedule to stop and take the time necessary to help this man, to care for him, and make sure he was okay. And the truth is, given our pace of life, this is probably far more difficult in our culture that it was in the first century.

But, if we're always in a hurry, if there's no breathing room in our schedule, if we're constantly stressed out and spread way too thin, rushing from one thing to the next, desperately trying to keep up with the pace of the rest of the culture around us...very few of us are actually going to be a blessing to people around us. We won't have compassion on others because we'll be too caught up in our own deal. We won't look to serve the people around us that are far from God because we can't slow down long enough to even notice that there are actually people all around us that God is inviting us to bless!

For some of us, the first thing we need to do tonight is reevaluate our schedule and build in some room to serve others. For others of us, God might be asking us to set aside a little bit of money each paycheck and create a line item in our budget for generosity & benevolence so that we're prepared to help when the opportunity presents itself.

I know we've said this every week in one way or another, but here's what we're going to do, Church. Even as we're praying for lost people, listening without judgment, eating meals, and serving those that are far from God, even if they never believe what we believe, even if they never profess faith in Christ, even if they never show an ounce of curiosity about Jesus, we're still going to serve them and be a blessing to them.

Even if they mock us or revile us for our faith, we're going to make room and find opportunities to serve them and be a blessing to them.

Why?

**Philippians 2:5-8**, "...Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a **servant**, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (ESV)

We're going to serve others because God served us. He emptied Himself and became a servant to His own creation. He laid down His life for us long before we knew Him or believed in Him.

Maybe today, you're ready to place your trust in Jesus to save you, to forgive you. I want to invite to make that decision, to pray a simple prayer, "*Jesus would you save*

*me? Forgive me of my sin and selfish living? Make me new. Fill me with the joy of salvation and with your Holy Spirit.”* If you pray that prayer today, I want to invite you to tell someone.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Think of a time when someone else served you. How did that impact you?  
What did that lead to in your relationship? Or even your relationship with God?
2. Who is God inviting you to serve this week?