

## Lesson: Loving Your Neighbor: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

### Lesson Overview

#### Biblical Passage

Luke 10:25-37

#### Memory Verse

Luke 10:27

#### Biblical Truth

God wants us to treat others with compassion, respect, and concern.

#### Context

Jesus' ministry had everything to do with revealing the nature of the Kingdom of God. Throughout His teaching, Jesus described living in a way that was opposite to the way people who did not belong to God lived. He described a neighbor as not just someone who lived next door or who shared the same values or culture. Instead, Jesus described neighbors as those of other nationalities, races, and cultural backgrounds and taught that they were to be treated with compassion, respect, and love.

### Commentary

#### Investigation

The hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans was well established when this Jewish leader approached Jesus. In trying to test Him, the leader never anticipated Jesus' response. Jesus used parables and hyperboles in order to state the obvious in not-so-obvious ways. This time, however, Jesus' illustration was pointed and obvious and would have even stung the typical Jew of that day. Because of old and deep prejudices, Jews went out of their way to avoid Samaria and Samaritans. Jesus' use of a Jewish enemy as the story's hero would have been difficult for His audience to accept. Nevertheless, the point would have been undeniable—even for the Jewish lawyer.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is specific to Luke because of His *Gentile* background. A parallel to the introductory conversation with the lawyer is found in Mark 12:28-31.

#### Importance

This passage teaches that *Jesus is God and Savior*. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus spoke with authority to confirm it. He also spoke with authority on the definition of who one's neighbor is. Because Jesus is God, His authority in faith and in relationships is entirely sufficient.

#### Interpretation

**Luke 10:25** While Jesus was teaching, a lawyer approached Him. In the New Testament, the designation of lawyer was used to identify an expert on the details of the Jewish religion. (The NIV lowercases "law" in regard to the lawyer's expertise, but it capitalizes "Law" when Jesus refers to the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. This does not, however, imply that the lawyer was only an expert in pharisaical law and not the Law of Moses. Numerous commentaries and several other Bible translations are in agreement that the lawyer was, in fact, an expert in the Mosaic Law, probably in addition to knowing the pharisaical law which Jesus frequently condemned.) This man, therefore, had excellent religious credentials. His life had been spent studying the Law and teaching people to obey it. The lawyer attempted to test Jesus, possibly to see what kind of teacher He was. His question was not necessarily meant to be hostile. How to obtain eternal life and how the Law was to be interpreted were often discussed among the Jewish religious leaders.

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**Luke 10:26-27** Since the man had studied the Law, Jesus asked him to answer the question from his interpretation of it. The lawyer knew the answer from Scripture: Eternal life was found by loving God completely and loving your neighbor as yourself (Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18).

In the Old Testament the word *neighbor* was used to describe people who lived in the same area. The word included those for whom one would take responsibility. By Jesus' time, however, rabbis had interpreted the word more strictly to include only those who were Jews and who followed the Law. The lawyer's response to Jesus was based on this understanding of a neighbor.

**Luke 10:28** Jesus affirmed that if the lawyer kept these commandments, the man would find eternal life. Jesus' response was based on the true understanding of loving God completely and loving others as God loved them. His response was not meant to tell the lawyer his understanding of his neighbor was correct, but rather, that God's law was more demanding.

**Luke 10:29** The lawyer responded, "And who is my neighbor?" With this question, he wanted to know how far love for people had to extend. Jews thought that only Jews were their neighbors. Jesus wanted people to understand that even their enemies were their neighbors. Loving God has no limits.

**Luke 10:30** Jesus helped the lawyer define who his neighbor was by telling him a story. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was extremely dangerous. A traveler would face a little more than 20 miles of steep, rocky terrain. The road was narrow with sudden turns and dropped 3,600 feet in elevation—all of which made for prime conditions for robbers and bandits. The first character that Jesus introduced was a man who had been robbed, beaten, stripped of his clothes, and left half dead while traveling this road.

**Luke 10:31** Next, Jesus introduced a priest. The priest saw the wounded man while he was traveling down the same road. The priest was carrying out his religious duties because he was returning ("going down") from the holy city of Jerusalem. Jesus' story gave no explanation of the priest's thoughts. He may have considered what it would cost him to help the man, but he probably would not have been able to tell whether the man was dead or alive. He might have been concerned since he would have been *ceremonially defiled* if he touched a dead person (Lev. 21:1). Some scholars suggest, however, that since the priest was returning from the Temple it would not have mattered if he became defiled. He also may have been thinking about the possibility of the robbers returning or how helping the man would affect the business he was tending to. Ultimately, he thought the price was too high. Not only did he decide not to help; he crossed to the other side of the road.

**Luke 10:32** Jesus next described a Levite. Levites were also religious men whose job was to assist in maintaining the Temple services. He too would have been risking ceremonial defilement to touch the man if he were dead. Since Levites traveled to Jerusalem in groups, the fact that he was alone showed that he, too, was traveling back from Jerusalem. Ceremonial defilement should not have been a concern. As a Jew and a religious man, the lawyer would have identified with the priest and the Levite. He would have expected a priest and a Levite to be the most likely people to help the man. In the actions of both the priest and the Levite, Jesus drew pictures of men who were more concerned with their own wellbeing than with the needs of another.

**Luke 10:33-34** Jesus then introduced a man whom the lawyer would have least expected to help the hurting man—a Samaritan. Longstanding racial and religious issues created tension between the Jews and the Samaritans. In contrast to the priest and Levite, however, the Samaritan "took pity" (felt deeply) on the injured traveler. He cleaned the beaten man's wounds with wine and used oil to soothe his pain. He probably would have used pieces of his own clothing to bind the man's wounds. The Samaritan then put the man on his own donkey. This meant that the Samaritan had to walk. He took the man to an inn and spent all night caring for him. With each example of the Samaritan's compassionate care, Jesus constructed a picture of sacrificially caring for others.

**Luke 10:35** The Samaritan not only covered the bill that night, but he also left enough money to take care of the man for one to two more months. Plus he also promised the innkeeper to cover any other expenses the man might need. Jesus presented a classic reversal: The hated Samaritan had become the story's hero, showing the kind of love that those desiring to please God should imitate.

**Luke 10:36-37** Jesus concluded His story by leading the lawyer to answer his own question about the identity of his neighbor. Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The obvious answer was the Samaritan. But the lawyer could only bring himself to say, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus then answered the lawyer's first question. To receive eternal life, Jesus answered, "Go and do likewise." God's requirement was to love others. To do less would be unacceptable.

### Implications

Peruse the shelves of a bookstore, and you will find numerous books on how to be successful, how to become rich, and how to

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help your self. But you will be hard-pressed to find books that teach or encourage people to put others before themselves. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus did not make a new commandment to ensure that others showed love. He instead referred to Scripture, which is the sufficient and authoritative source for answers of faith and life. Because *Jesus is God and Savior*, He affirmed the command to love one's neighbor as oneself. Adults need to understand that they should not choose to whom they show and do not show love. The very nature of Christ and His Kingdom demands that all of His followers show love to all people so that all nations can come to know Him.

By studying this lesson, adults should begin to understand that Jesus calls on them to think differently than they have been trained to think by this world. Faith in Christ should produce the fruit of love for one another. Once grasped, adults will begin to see that the Kingdom of God presents a whole new paradigm in which life is lived differently from how most people are conditioned and trained to approach it. In God's Kingdom there is unconditional love for everyone.

- **How can our search for answers be dangerous if we do not search Scripture?**  
**What boundaries do we tend to use as excuses to not care for people?**
- **If we consider someone who lives in Africa to be our neighbor just as the person who lives next door, how should that affect how we relate to Africa?**
- **If loving people reflected how much you love God, how much would people think you love Him?**

### A Good Samaritan?

**Jesus' use of a Samaritan as the hero of the story was quite a shock to His listeners because of the longstanding hatred between Jews and Samaritans.** Remind learners that after King Solomon's death the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel (and Samaria) and the southern kingdom of Judah. Explain that after this split the Assyrian Empire conquered Samaria in 722 B.C., bringing in non-Jewish people to inhabit the land. Provide the following information:

- After the kingdom split, Judea thought of the northern kingdom as a group of rebels.
- The Samaritans intermarried with the Assyrians after the fall of the northern kingdom. Therefore, Jews considered the Samaritans to be half-breeds and Gentiles.
- When the Jews were released from captivity in Babylon and attempted to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, they refused help from the Samaritans.
- The Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim for worship, which the Jews considered an improper place of worship.

Ask: **Why do you think Jesus used a Samaritan in His parable?** (Answer: To emphasize that neighbors are not determined by our own boundaries) **Who might be a modern-day Samaritan to you?** (Muslim extremists, criminals, people with whom you have a bad relationship)