



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 10:25-37

To understand what it means to be a good neighbor.

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

In 1951, during his senior of college at Rollins College, Fred Rogers encountered a TV at his parents' home. In a CNN interview he explained, "I went into television because I hated it so, and I thought there's some way of using this fabulous instrument to nurture those who would watch and listen." He began working on various shows behind the scenes after his graduation in 1951, and by 1968 launched the ever-famous *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, a show whose tagline was: "Won't you be my neighbor?" Mr. Rogers saw the world very simply, through the eyes of a Presbyterian minister who loved kids and wanted them to feel safe, loved, and known not only by people, but ultimately by God. There is a great story about a 6-year-old little girl named Amy Melder who sent Mr. Rogers a drawing she made along with a letter that talked about her love for Jesus. His response has since been made public: "You told me that you have accepted Jesus as your Savior. It means a lot to me to know that. And, I appreciated the scripture verse that you sent. I am an ordained Presbyterian minister, and I want you to know that Jesus is important to me, too. I hope that God's love and peace come through my work on Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." It seems that Mr. Rogers wasn't as concerned with who his neighbor was as much as he was concerned with being a good neighbor himself.

In this week's passage, an "expert in the law" comes to Jesus to ask Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life" (Lk. 25) and Jesus responds by having the lawyer answer what is written in the law: "Love the Lord your God" and "your neighbor as yourself." But this doesn't satisfy the lawyer, but instead sparks an additional question: "And who is my neighbor?" This context sets up *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*.

The Parable

This parable is given in response to the lawyer's question, "who is my neighbor," and involves several different characters. Below is an outline of each of them.

AN UNNAMED MAN

The parable begins with an unnamed man who was "going down from Jerusalem to Jericho" (Lk. 10:30). Jerusalem sits at approximately 2,600 feet above sea level whereas Jericho is 825 feet below sea level, so to leave from Jerusalem to go anywhere meant "going down." Jericho was roughly 18 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem, so this was a sizable but reasonable distance to travel. In his travels, he "fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead" (Lk. 10:30). This highlights a reality that is not often talked about. Traveling in the ancient world was difficult and dangerous for a variety of reasons. Apart from the danger of weather and natural predators, bandits and robbers also posed a real threat to one's life and well-being. For this unnamed man, being left "half-dead" indicates that unless someone intervenes, he will die as a result of his injuries.

A PRIEST

But Jesus says, "By chance, a priest was going down that road" (Lk. 10:31). What fortune! His travels are not totally unexpected given that most priests didn't live in Jerusalem, but traveled from smaller outside cities. This priest was likely either going home or maybe even to Jericho as well, but that he was "going down that road," and not "going up" indicates that he was leaving the same city as the unnamed man. A priest, a servant of God's Temple, should be counted on by those who were in need, but that he "passed by on the other side" indicates a cruel indifference to others. This was the reality of the priesthood during Jesus' day; cold, callous, and uninterested in actually serving others.

A LEVITE

Another man approaches, this time "a Levite" (Lk. 10:32). The inclusion of the Levite and the priest is representative of the two most "professional" types of religious leaders at this time. They were the ones who, of all people, should have been most willing to help a man nearing death. Yet, in the same manner as the priest, the Levite "passed by on the other side."

A SAMARITAN

A third man approaches, this time "a Samaritan" (Lk. 10:33). The Samaritan represents everything the Jews hated. Samaritans were seen as rebellious "half-breeds" to the Jews. After the split of the united monarchy resulting from Solomon's sin, the 10 tribes represented in Israel (or sometimes called Ephraim, and now referred to as Samaria) were sent into Assyrian captivity. During that time, significant intermarriage took place and the result was an impure people. The hostility was great between these two groups of people (Jn. 4:9; 8:48). However, to Jesus' audience's surprise, the Samaritan "had compassion" on the man. This is the second time this phrase "had compassion" is used in Luke's Gospel, the first being when Jesus saw the widow who had just lost her only son (Lk. 7:13). The Samaritan took the man "to an inn" and "bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine" (Lk. 10:34). The inn (πανδοχείον) mentioned here is an actual motel-like establishment that required pay to stay (Lk. 10:35), and is different than the inn (κατάλυμα) mentioned in Luke 2:7, which was likely an extra room in Joseph's family's home. The oil and wine given to treat the man's wounds were expensive, and that coupled with his willingness to pay an additional amount of denarii upon his return revealed the Samaritan's radical charity to the injured man.

A QUESTION

After telling this parable, Jesus asks the lawyer a question: “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?” This is an interesting question because Jesus has actually changed the original question that the lawyer asked. The lawyer was treating the “neighbor” as an object. He wanted Jesus to define this object so he could be sure to love the right group of people and not waste his love and care for the wrong group of people. Jesus, however, changes the concept of “neighbor” from object to subject. In other words, rather than asking “Who is my neighbor,” Jesus is asking the man, “What kind of neighbor are you?” When we try and define who our neighbor is, it allows us to limit our love for others to only a group of “worthy” candidates, but when I define myself as a neighbor, I am left with only to love everyone around me. This forces the lawyer to answer, “The one who showed him mercy” (Lk. 10:27); the disgusting, half-breed, unclean Samaritan. And Jesus says, “You go, and do likewise” (Lk. 10:37) In other words, “Go, and be like the one you were hoping I would tell you is not your neighbor.”

What About Now?

There is one major takeaway, and that is that answering the question “What kind of neighbor am I” is far more important than trying to determine who neighbor is. So often, we want to limit our love and ministry to people that we think are worthy of our time and energy. There are some, we reason, that don’t deserve it because they will only squander it. And Jesus is more interested in us considering what kind of neighbor we will be rather than what kind of neighbors we should have. If we want to qualify those we help in any kind of way based on this parable, it would stand to reason that we should help those who are in dire need of help and those to whom no one else wants to give it. The rejects, the outcasts, the socially unacceptable who are in need of God’s love are the ones we ought to be willing to give God’s love to, not only by word but deed.

Study Questions**Day One**

1. Read Luke 10:25. What was the lawyer seeking to do to Jesus? What question did he ask Him?

2. Read Luke 10:26-27. What question did Jesus respond with? How did the lawyer answer the question?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 10:28-29. What was Jesus’ response? What did the lawyer ask, and why did he ask this question?

2. Read Luke 10:30. What was the man in this parable doing, and what happened to him along the way?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 10:31-32. Who approached him first? How did he respond to the injured man? Who approached him second? How did he respond to the man? Why were both of these men mentioned? What do they represent?
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2. Read Luke 10:33-35. Who approached him third? How did he respond to the injured man? Why was this significant? Who were the Samaritans, and what kind of relationship did they have with the Jews? (Hint: See above notes)
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Day Four

1. Read Luke 10:36. What question did Jesus ask the lawyer after telling this parable?
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2. Read Luke 10:37. How did the lawyer answer this question? What did Jesus say in response to his answer?
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Week 40 Discussion: Neighbor

The major theme of this parable is the concept of what it means to be a neighbor. The lawyer wanted to know who his neighbor was; Jesus wants him instead to consider what kind of neighbor he will be. Talk as a group about what kind of neighbor you are to other people, and how you might need to rethink this, and how your group can help you be the kind of neighbor Jesus describes in this parable.

1. Icebreaker: Are you a good neighbor to other people in the way Jesus describes? Why or why not?
2. Who are you most naturally drawn to helping?
3. Who are you most naturally resistant to helping?
4. In your opinion, what group/s of people is/are the modern-day Samaritans (outcasts)?
5. Are there any dangers in helping other people? If so, what are they?
6. How can the church help you be a better neighbor?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan.
2. Jesus would rather us consider what kind of neighbor we can instead of who are neighbors are.