

OPENING DISCUSSION:

Do you know the names of your neighbors?

Are any of them your friends?

Do you like them, or is there something about them that you do not care for?

Is it their lifestyle, or their political views, or maybe that they like a rival sports team? How do you even define the term “neighbor”?

Spend some time talking about the people around you and your thoughts about them. In today’s passage, Christ challenges how an expert in the Jewish law views people who are not like him and shares with us how a true follower of him should behave.

BIG PICTURE/MAIN IDEA:

Synopsis: There are no limits to the disciple’s duty to love other people, even the most unlikely.

Luke’s main point in retelling the parable must have been what it means to be a neighbor. Jesus (and Luke) sought to illustrate that the love of one’s neighbor must transcend all natural or human boundaries such as race, nationality, religion, and economic or educational status.

KEY POINTS IN THE PASSAGE:

- The essence of discipleship is to love God and to love other people.
- The “neighbor” whom we are to love is not limited to members of our own group.
- Jesus chooses a Samaritan, one of the group most hated by the Jews, as the model of neighbor love.
- The Samaritan’s love for his “enemy” is practical and costly.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

READ Luke 10:25-37 and answer the questions below:

Who was speaking to Jesus in this passage? What was the first question he asked him?

How did Jesus respond to this question?

What did the lawyer ask Jesus to define? How did Jesus begin his response to the question?

Who were the characters in the parable?

What question did Jesus ask at the end of the parable? What was the response of the lawyer?

Jesus's debates with religious leaders are usually hostile, but here we see him in essential agreement with a legal expert. This summary of the law, offered by the lawyer and approved by Jesus, could hardly be faulted (see the admiring response of the scribe in Mark 12:32–33). It is not in his basic understanding of the law that Jesus was out on a limb, but in the radical comprehensiveness of the way he applied it. This parable subverts not the ethical demand of the law, but the Jewish sense of ethnic superiority.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Use the information from the text and the commentary notes below to help discern responses to the following questions:

Why do you think the lawyer was trying test Jesus?

Why do you think Christ answered the lawyer's question with a parable?

Why do you think Jesus included a priest and a Levite in his story? Why were they important to the story?

Why do you think Jesus made the Samaritan the protagonist of the story?

How would you describe the main point of the parable in your own words?

On Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, which began in 9:51, much attention is focused on the nature and demands of discipleship. Here a question from someone outside the disciple group prompts Jesus to illustrate the central demand of discipleship by telling one of his best-loved parables. The famous "summary of the law" in the twofold demand to love God and to love one's neighbor occurs in all three Synoptic Gospels, but Luke's presentation of it is distinctive in two ways: first, it is the questioner, not Jesus, who first offers the summary; second, Jesus provides extensive comment on it in the form of the parable of the good Samaritan. The recent hostile reception of Jesus and his disciples by a Samaritan village (9:51–56) provides a telling backdrop to a parable that depends for its effect on the enmity between Jews and Samaritans.

Cultural/Historical Background

The mutual hostility between Jews and Samaritans goes back to the separation of Israel into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah after the death of Solomon. It reached a peak in the attempts of the Samaritans to prevent the reestablishment of the kingdom of Judah under Ezra and Nehemiah. The separate Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim was destroyed by the Jewish king Hyrcanus in the second century BC, and Samaritans had desecrated the Jerusalem temple during Jesus's boyhood. For the continuing standoff, see John 4: 9. Luke's Gospel is remarkable in that both here and in 17:11–19 a

Samaritan is favorably contrasted with Jews. Rabbinic writings contain a number of attempts to summarize the demands of the 613 commandments of the Mosaic law in a few key texts (especially b. Mak. 24a, where surprisingly the chosen texts are not from the Torah itself, as here, but from the psalms and the prophets), but only Jesus (and his questioner here) seems to have brought together Deuteronomy 6:5 (“Love the LORD your God”) and Leviticus 19: 18 (“Love your neighbor as yourself”) for this purpose.

HOW DOES IT APPLY?

Which one of the people in this passage do you relate to the most?

What does it mean to love God with all your heart? What about loving your neighbor as yourself?

Who are people you view as “Samaritans”? What is it about them that you don’t like? How can the group pray for you to show them mercy and love?

Have someone in the group read 1 Corinthians 13. How can you exhibit this kind of love to those around you? Spend time as a group praying for the issues brought up by group members and encourage one another as you strive to show love to others in your life.

COMMENTARY NOTES:

10:25 An expert in the law (lawyer) stood up to test Jesus. Both Luke and Matthew (Matt 22:35) saw this question as a hostile one and agreed against Mark in calling the person an expert in the law (see comments on 7:30) rather than a teacher of the law (Mark 12:28). **What must I do to inherit eternal life?** For “eternal life” cf. Luke 18:18, 30; Acts 13:46, 48. This is a good question, not to be confused with an attempt to earn salvation. It is repeated in 18:18 and with some variation in Acts 2:37 and 16:30. All four passages express the same basic question and reveal that “eternal life” is a synonym for being “saved,” or entering God’s kingdom (cf. 18:18 with 18:24). The four responses should be understood as variant ways of giving the same answer.

10:26 What is written in the Law? See comments on 2:22. Jesus’ question revealed that the answer to the lawyer’s question is found in the OT. What “is written” is decisive. Compare 10:28. As in the case of the rich ruler (18:18–23), Jesus affirmed the law. The teaching of the law is definitive. The way to eternal life is the same in both the OT and the NT. It is by grace through a faith that works in love (Gal 5:6). At times the word “faith” may need to be emphasized; at other times, “love.” The answer given in Luke 10:27 involves a faith consisting of love for God and one’s neighbor, for it is inconceivable to love God apart from faith. Furthermore, a faith that does not produce love of one’s neighbor is dead (Jas 2:17). It is no faith; it never was faith.

10:27 He answered. In both Mark and Matthew, Jesus gave the following answer. In Luke the expert in the law answered. Love the Lord your God ... and love your neighbor. The expert's answer consisted of two OT passages. The first (Deut 6:5) was called the *Shema* because it begins "Hear, O Israel." A devout Jew would repeat it twice each day (Ber. 1:1–4). In the Shema three prepositional phrases describe the total response of love toward God. These involve the heart (emotions), the soul (consciousness), and strength (motivation). The Synoptic Gospels all have "heart" and "soul," Matthew omits strength, and all add "mind" (intelligence). The second OT passage in the lawyer's answer is Lev 19:18. It is found also in Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; and Jas 2:8. In Luke the two OT passages are combined into a single command, whereas in Mark 12:31; Matt 22:39 they are left separate. Whether these two OT passages were linked before Jesus' time is uncertain.⁴³ They appear together in the early Christian literature. That this twofold summary was basic to Jesus' teaching is evident by its appearance in his parables (Luke 15:18, 21; 18:2; cf. also 11:42, where "justice" equals "love your neighbor"). For a similar but indirect connection, see Mic 6:8. **Neighbor.** For most Jews a neighbor was another Jew, not a Samaritan or a Gentile. The Pharisees (John 7:49) and the Essenes did not even include all Jews (1QS 1:9–10). The teaching of the latter stands in sharp contrast with that of Jesus. The Essenes taught that one was to love all the children of light who are part of the community but to hate the children of darkness who stand outside the community. There appears to be a chiasma between this verse and what follows: God—neighbor—man/neighbor (Luke 10:29–37)—Jesus/God (10:38–42).

10:28 You have answered correctly. Jesus' affirmation reveals to Luke's readers that 10:27 is indeed the way to eternal life (cf. 18:20). **Do this and you will live.** Another way of phrasing this idea is found in Acts 2:38 and 16:31 (cf. Lev 18:5). The verb "do this" is in a present imperative, and Luke emphasized by this the continual nature of the Christian commitment (cf. Luke 9:23).

10:29 But he wanted to justify himself. This indicates a less than sincere response on the part of the lawyer, reinforcing his negative attitude in 10:25. **And who is my neighbor?** This is not the same question as the one asked by Jesus in 10:36. Luke almost certainly was aware of this. It is quite possible that he saw Jesus in the parable twisting this improper question, "Who is my neighbor?" (i.e., what must a person do to qualify that I should love him as a neighbor?) into a proper one ("What must I do to be a loving neighbor?"). See comments on 10:36.

10:30 A man. Luke used this expression (literally a certain man) only when introducing a parable. See comments on 16:19. **Was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.** Because Jerusalem sits on a mountain twenty-five hundred feet above sea level, one always goes down from Jerusalem no matter which direction one takes. Jericho was seventeen miles east of Jerusalem and approximately eight hundred feet below sea level. **When he fell into the hands of robbers.** Robbers hid in the mountains, rocks, and desert along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

10:31 A priest. As descendant of Aaron involved in the sacrifices and maintenance of the temple, as well as in various purification rites, a priest could not defile himself by contact with the dead, except in the case of a close relative. Some have suggested that this was why the priest refused any contact with the presumably dead man. Others have suggested that he feared stopping because he might then be attacked by robbers. Still others hypothesize that he had just finished his service in the temple. Luke did

not imply anything like this, and attempts to ascertain the inner thoughts and motives of the priest are irrelevant because he is a fictional character. This particular priest never existed. It is pointless to discuss what the priest and Levite were thinking as they came upon this man. If an author wants to place particular thoughts in the mind of his fictional character, he may certainly do so, but he must then share them with his readers. **Happened to be going.** This may have been intended to show that it was a lonely road. **Passed by on the other side.** This is a colorful way of describing the priest's unwillingness to love his neighbor as himself.

10:32 So, too, a Levite. The Levite was a descendant of Levi who assisted the priests in various sacrificial duties and policing the temple but could not perform the sacrificial acts. Luke was not suggesting that since the Levite's duties were inferior to those of a priest he might have been more open to help because the problem of becoming defiled was less acute. Rather he was emphasizing that neither the wise and understanding (10:21) nor the proud and ruling (1:51–52) practice being loving neighbors. **Passed by on the other side.** The Levite behaved just like the priest.

10:33 But a Samaritan. The term "Samaritan" is in an emphatic position in the sentence. Jesus deliberately chose an outsider, and a hated one at that, for his hero in order to indicate that being a neighbor is not a matter of nationality or race. The mutual hatred of the Jews and the Samaritans is evident in such passages as John 4:9; 8:48. The united kingdom was divided after Solomon's death due to the foolishness of his son, Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12). The ten northern tribes formed a nation known variously as Israel, Ephraim, or (after the capital city built by Omri) Samaria. In 722 b.c. Samaria fell to the Assyrians, and the leading citizens were exiled and dispersed throughout the Assyrian Empire. Non-Jewish peoples were then brought into Samaria. Intermarriage resulted, and the "rebels" became "half-breeds" in the eyes of the Southern Kingdom of Judea. (Jews comes from the term Judea.) After the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, the Samaritans sought at first to participate in the rebuilding of the temple. When their offer of assistance was rejected, they sought to impede its building (Ezra 4–6; Neh 2–4). The Samaritans later built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, but led by John Hyrcanus the Jews destroyed it in 128 b.c. (cf. John 4:20–21). So great was Jewish and Samaritan hostility that Jesus' opponents could think of nothing worse to say of him than, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" (John 8:48; cf. also 4:9). **Took pity on him.** This action is like that of Jesus in Luke 7:13 and the gracious father in 15:20.

10:34 He bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. The lovingkindness of the Samaritan is shown in his applying basic first aid and "medicines" to his neighbor (cf. Sabb. 19:2; Isa 1:6). Put the man on his own donkey. This shows the desperate condition of the man. Took him to an inn. That this "inn" had an "innkeeper" (Luke 10:35) indicates that it was much closer to a present-day inn than the inn in 2:7.

10:35 Two silver coins. An attempt to translate the value of "two silver coins" (literally two denarii) into a present-day monetary unit has little meaning. A denarius was the equivalent of a day's wages for a working man (cf. Matt 20:2, 9, 13). This indicates that sufficient money was given to take care of the penniless man. The Samaritan made wise use of his possessions (oil, wine, donkey, money) and thus provides the reader with an example of appropriate use of material goods demanded at Luke 6:32–36 (cf. also 16:9–12), for he gave expecting nothing in return. See comments on 20:24.

10:36 In his counter-question to 10:29 (cf. 7:40–42), Jesus indicated that one should worry less about who a neighbor is than about being a good neighbor. See comments on 10:29. Jesus' counter-question reversed the roles, so that just as Jesus answered the lawyer's question (10:29), the lawyer had to answer Jesus.

10:37 The expert ... replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Note the lawyer's avoidance of the term "Samaritan," which would have been the more natural way of answering the question.