

Who Is My Neighbor?

Scripture: [Luke 10:25–37](#)

Theme: Mercy in Action

Open your Bible to Luke 10:25–37 where Jesus told one of His most powerful and challenging parables. It's a short, simple story He used to teach a very spiritual and moral lesson. And He compared it to an ordinary, everyday situation to reveal a deeper truth about faith. It's the story of *The Good Samaritan*. A story so familiar we often miss how deeply it challenges us. Not just to feel kindness. But to *live* with kindness. Listen to the Word of the Lord:

"And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' 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 he said to him, 'You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.' But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

And that question is a challenge to you! Notice the man asking that question was an expert in the *Law of Moses*. The commandments, rules, and instructions given by God to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. He was a religious scholar. He didn't ask, "How can I love God better?" or "What can I do to serve more?" He asked, "*Who is my neighbor?*" In other words, "Where can I draw the line?" That's a deeply human question, isn't it? We often ask not how far does our love has to go? But how far does it *have* to go? Who do you really want to care about? Where does your responsibility end? And Jesus didn't give that man a rulebook. He gave him a story. A story that shatters boundaries. Here it is!

A Jewish man was attacked and left for dead along the side of a road. Two religious leaders came to where the man lay. One was a Jewish priest who presided over religious festivals and holy days at the Temple in Jerusalem. He taught the *Law of Moses*. He blessed people with a priestly blessing. The other? He was a Levite. A member of the tribe of Levi. One of the twelve tribes of Israel that had been set apart by God for religious duties during the Exodus from Egypt. Later in the Temple in Jerusalem, Levites served a special role in Jewish worship. Those two religious leaders just walked on by the man! Maybe they had their reasons. Concern about their own safety. Laws of cleanliness. Maybe time? Anyway, they walked away.

Then, a Samaritan who lived between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south came along. Jews and Samaritans had a long-standing and bitter hostility toward one another. After the Jewish people had been taken in the 6th century BC from their homeland to live in Babylon for 70 years, many returned and began rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. That laid the groundwork for Judaism as a faith that could survive without a nation or a Temple. But the returning Jews led by Zerubbabel, were focused on restoring pure worship according to the Law of Moses. The Samaritans, however, practiced a mixed religion. A combination of Yahweh worship, the personal name of the God of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, and the pagan practices of the Assyrians who settled in the region. (2 Kings 17:24–41) The Jews feared that allowing Samaritan participation would compromise the holiness and legitimacy of the Temple.

So, the returning Jews rejected Samaritan offers to help rebuild the Jerusalem Temple. And that led to hostility and mutual contempt. And this is what makes the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) especially powerful and challenging. An outsider despised by the Jews comes along and shows compassion. He doesn't just stop to check the man. He bandaged his wounds. He put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn. Paid for his care. Promised to return. And that's when Jesus turned the question around. "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*" The lawyer couldn't bring himself to say, "the Samaritan." He said, "*The one who showed mercy.*" And Jesus said, "*Go and do likewise.*"

So, what does it mean to live like that? To "*show mercy?*" It means to offer kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Or to help someone, especially when they don't deserve it. Or when it would be easier to just turn away. This parable teaches three things about love and mercy.

First, it teaches that sympathy is not passive. It moves. The Samaritan *saw, had compassion, and acted*. True sympathy doesn't sit still. It crosses the street. It gets messy. It gives time, money and energy.

Secondly, mercy is not limited by boundaries. The Samaritan had every excuse to walk on by. Racial hostility. Cultural divides. Personal risk. But compassion does not ask, "*Do I owe this person something?*" It asks, "*What does love require of me here?*"

And third, a neighbor is not just the one who is nearby. It's the one who is in need. Jesus redefined "*neighbor.*" It's not about who qualifies as your neighbor. It's about how you live your life! The question isn't "Who is my neighbor?" The question is, "Am I being a neighbor?" And let's not miss the deeper truth. Jesus Himself is the ultimate Good Samaritan.

We're the ones beaten and left for dead. Wounded by sin. Hopeless on our own. The law couldn't save us. Religion walked on by.

But Jesus came. He crossed the divide of heaven and earth and saw us. He had compassion. He healed our wounds. He paid the price for our healing—with His own life! Which makes this story not just about being good people. It's about responding to God's mercy with lives of merciful action. My friends, we live in a world that often divides race, class, and politics. Even religion. And that makes it tempting to draw boundaries around our love.

But Jesus calls us to something greater. He calls us to live our lives with *radical compassion*. And what makes compassion "Radical"? It's not based on who the person is. What they've done. Or whether they deserve it. It's unconditional. Without limits. No requirements. No conditions. When something is unconditional, it's given freely. Not based on someone's behavior, status, or ability to repay. Unconditional means no strings attached! Not "*if you do this then I'll love you.*" Just pure, steady, faithful giving.

That's the way God treats us. Radical compassion. It reflects the heart of Jesus who reached out to sinners, outcasts, and enemies. In simple terms, radical compassion is love in action. Even when it's hard. It's going beyond the bare minimum. Loving like Jesus loved. Even when it costs you something. To be someone who stops, who serves, and who sacrifices.

So, who is your neighbor? It might be someone who doesn't look like you. Vote like you. Or believe like you. It might be someone across the street. Or across the ocean. It might even be someone who has hurt you. But Jesus said: "*Go and do likewise.*" And how does a church live by radical compassion? It welcomes everyone. No exceptions! Its doors are open to all people. Regardless of race, background, status, sin, or struggle. It is a judgment-free place where people feel seen, heard, and loved.

Matthew 11:28 says, "*Let all who are weary come.*" Seek out the hurting. Go to the homeless, the lonely, the imprisoned, the addicted, the grieving, or the forgotten, as we are doing with Holly's Hope. Don't just wait for them to come to church. Be partners with shelters, prisons, hospitals, schools, and at-risk communities as we have with the After School Program in Baja, Mexico, and The Shelter for Abused Women and Children in Collier County. Like the *Good Samaritan*, a compassionate church doesn't pass by suffering. It stops. It kneels. And it helps! It offers food to 130 families, as we do in our Wednesday Food Distribution program. It helps families with unpaid bills. Provides rides to doctors and hospitals. It listens. Deeply. Or simply sits with someone in pain. No strings attached. Jesus directly challenged us by showing radical compassion across cultural boundaries.

A radically compassionate church serves because of love. Not for recognition. A radically compassionate church says: "*You are welcome here—no questions asked.*" That's why Jesus broke all social norms. By healing, touching, and eating with the outcast. Radical compassion means walking with people through messy change. Not just their easy moments. A church that lives by radical compassion welcomes others like Jesus. Serves without limits. Forgives freely. Loves beyond comfort. Speaks truth gently. And moves toward pain. Not away from it! After telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus said, "*Go and do likewise.*" (Luke 10:37) And may the world know us, not by our church attendance or theology. But by our mercy and love.

Let us pray. Go now into the world with your eyes open to see the wounded. With a heart ready to show mercy. And with hands prepared to serve. May you love not just with your words. But with action and truth. May you cross boundaries to extend grace and express the compassion of Christ. And as you go, may the God of mercy walk beside you. The grace of Jesus Christ go before you. And the Spirit of love dwell richly within you. Go and do likewise. Amen.