



"If you are really thankful, what do you do? You share."
—W. Clement Stone

21-Jan-22

Be a Good Neighbor

My wife and I have a friend whose life has been hit with a series of crises. Through no apparent fault of her own, trials on multiple fronts have confronted her. Our friend's predicament has moved us, and we have wondered, "How far should we go in helping someone who is not a brother or sister in the church of [God](#)?" How does the Bible respond to this question?

In [Luke 10:30-37](#), [Jesus](#) gives the Parable of the Good Samaritan, a story about a traveler helping a stranger dying on the road. He was prompted to present this teaching when a Jewish lawyer asked a self-justifying question: "And who is my neighbor?" (verse 29).

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came, and looked, and passed by on the other side.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and

bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

"So, which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

In his 2009 sermon, "[Love Thy Neighbor \(Part Two\)](#)," John Ritenbaugh comments that, in this parable,

Jesus shows it is not so much a question of asking who our neighbor is, but instead asking ourselves the question, "Am I a neighbor to this person?" Maybe if we begin to ask this question more frequently, God will show us what it is we need to do in any given situation.

First-century Jews would have considered only fellow Israelites to be their neighbors. Jesus, however, defines "neighbor" much more broadly. Practicing love toward a neighbor is more than just doing good things for those who look like us and who can respond in kind. The Samaritan's actions for a total stranger who was unconscious exemplify outgoing concern. The wounded man is described only as a man traveling to Jericho. He could have been anyone.

Showing true love for neighbor, then, does not consider ancestry, skin color, language, wealth, religious affiliation, or anything other than need. The Samaritan genuinely sought the best for the wounded man. As a Samaritan, he may not have agreed with the traveler's beliefs, and Jesus never indicates that he was trying to gain his approval. He just attended to the injured man's needs with what he had at his disposal. He did what he could.

The Bible contains many instructions on how to treat our fellow man. For instance, Jesus teaches the Golden Rule: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" ([Matthew 7:12](#)). It is a perfect parallel with the Second Great Commandment, which our Savior defines in [Matthew 22:39](#), "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We understand that loving our neighbors as ourselves is the foundational principle of the last six of God's Ten Commandments.

By His example, Jesus shows us the meaning of love. He felt compassion and cured all those who came to Him. He loved all of them, even people who were not "in the church." As [John 3:16](#) says, "For God so loved [the world](#) that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Both the Father and the Son love all humanity and want to give them what is best for them. We need to learn to follow Their example.

The apostle Paul writes in [Galatians 6:10](#), "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of [faith](#)." The Greek word translated as "all" implies everyone and everything, and the one rendered as "especially" signifies "chiefly, most of all, above all." Paul teaches that we are to do good to everybody, as we have the opportunity, but if there is ever a question of priorities, we must put God, Christ, and the church as the first recipients of our time, energy, devotion, and commitment.

Jesus presents the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in [Matthew 25:31-46](#), clearly showing that He bases His judgments on how His people treat their brethren. He says that whatever we do to the least of the brethren, we do to Him (verse 40). How we treat other members of His spiritual Body, the church, is a significant part of His evaluation of us.

In [Galatians 5:13-14](#), Paul encourages us, "For you, brethren, . . . through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Again, Scripture admonishes us to serve one another, that is, fellow members of the church, those with whom we fellowship from week to week.

Yet, we in God's church need to remember that our human tendency, like the Pharisees, is to love only those like us and hate outsiders. But God has called us to be holy ([1 Peter 1:15](#)), a word that implies "cut out for special use" or "a cut above." We must be different in a good and righteous way. Jesus asks in [Matthew 5:46](#), "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" He concludes with the astounding charge, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (verse 48).

It is easy to become jaded when so many questionable people constantly ask for our money. We sometimes have difficulty mustering empathy and relating to those in unfortunate situations. Even so, when we have opportunities to do good and have the power to do so, we should take them, as both Old and New Testaments encourage ([Proverbs 3:27](#); [James 4:17](#)). As the old saying declares, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Yet, we are physical beings with limited time, resources, education, and strength. Loving God is the primary commandment, and after our devotion to God and Christ, we must prioritize and help our brethren in the church before others. But, after that, our work is still not yet done: We are further charged to help those who will be our future brothers and sisters. It is a challenge to live up to the example of our Savior. As Paul says in [Acts 14:22](#), "We must through many tribulations enter the [kingdom of God](#)." The essence of love is sacrifice, and being a living sacrifice ([Romans 12:1](#)) can be costly and painful.

So how far should we go to be a good neighbor? It is up to us to determine how much we can help, but after praying about it, making an honest evaluation, and prioritizing according to Scripture, maybe—just maybe—with God's help, we can be better neighbors to one and all.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Love Thy Neighbor \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

Loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves cannot be separated. One cannot obey one command and ignore the other without having violated both. We need to be a neighbor to the needy crossing our path. Christian living requires keeping the "love thy neighbor" aspect of the spiritual law, demonstrated by giving physical aid to the neediest among us, especially our spiritual brothers. Our neighbors include our employees or employers to whom we must serve as we would Jesus Christ, even those who are harsh and unreasonable, emulating Jesus Christ, who did not retaliate even though He had the capability. David, a man after God's own heart, studied the creation in order to learn God's mind. These encounters strengthened David to endure hardships and humiliation, realizing that God had ordered these experiences for his ultimate good. As we encounter other human beings, we need to realize that we are all in this same creative process together, showing pity and compassion on them, just as our Heavenly Father does. Jesus sets the bar very high when it comes to love. We no longer live for ourselves, but to Christ, who commands us to love all of mankind, including our enemies.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Learning to Love One Another](#)

by Geoff Preston

We may look around the church of God and wonder why so many are not being healed. Geoff Preston, suffering a chronic illness himself, uses his experiences to assure us that God is working out even these matters for our good.

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