

Luke 10:36-37 How can we be the best neighbor? Pentecost 8 August 1, 4, 2019

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God's grace, peace, and love are given into our hearts through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.
Jesus' Word about a neighbor's love is written in Luke 10:36-37

These are your words heavenly Father. Teach us through them to love one another. Your Word is truth!

Dear Christian neighbors,

All of us know who our neighbors are, right? We may not know their names, but they are ones who live nearby or they are people we can depend on when we have a problem and they can depend on us to be a good neighbor. God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. As with all commands of God, being a good neighbor is not optional. It is to be a goal for us to do every day. Since we're seeking to follow Jesus' love, we don't want to be just an okay neighbor, we want to be the best neighbor ever. From Jesus' lesson of the Samaritan neighbor we should ask:

How can we be the best neighbor?

What does God's Word say? We are to put God first, our neighbor second, ourselves as third. The expert who knew the Old Testament very well, thought he loved God and people. But he had a major problem of selfishness. He asked Jesus, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" (v.25). He thought that being a neighbor was all about him! I could hear him say, "God, I am an important person. Look what I do!" Jesus referred him to the Bible: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself*" (v.27).

We begin to be a good neighbor when we love God. We are to love God with our whole being, putting Him and His will before our own. We honor God more than wanting to honor ourselves. If we need to spend time or money when helping neighbors, remember that time and money are gifts from a loving God. John wrote, "*Dear friends, let us love [have a commitment to] one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love*" (1 John 4:7-8). Be a Neighbor = know and show God's love!

Second, we can learn from the examples of people in the parable. These people help us to understand the challenge of become a "best neighbor." Jesus said, "*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead*" (v.30). The robbers took advantage of a traveler, who should not have been alone. Normally, people who left Jerusalem traveled in groups for safety. But, leaving alone, he became an easy target for the robbers. They not only took his money, they took his clothes in case money had been sown into the lining of the clothes. If that wasn't bad enough, they beat him and left him for dead alongside the road.

It happened that a priest was getting off duty from his service at the temple. He had been offering prayers for the people and he had taken the blood of the sacrificed animals and poured it out before the altar, according to God's command, as a visible sign of God's forgiveness based on Christ. The priest saw the man but didn't stop. A Levite also walked that path from Jerusalem. He was usually a strong man to handle the lifting and killing of the sacrifices. He too was off duty, so he didn't have an excuse not to stop and help the wounded man. Both these men knew the law of God to love their neighbor as themselves. Yet, neither one wanted to apply the law to this wounded man for whatever reasons they had or feared.

Jesus said next that a Samaritan approached the wounded man. Samaritans were generally despised by the Jews and the Jews by the Samaritans. Think of this example from Luke 9. Jesus and His disciples were traveling through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem where the Samaritans were not allowed to worship. So, they refused to let Jesus spend the night in their town. Peter and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to burn up the city. Road rage is nothing new! But, Jesus rebuked them and they went on. Since the Samaritans worshipped false gods along with the true God, the Jews never would have expected the Samaritan to help a wounded Jew. And he could have easily looked the other way and went by. But, he had compassion for him. He was moved by the man's desperate need. Our verses state, *"He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. Whatever extra you spend, I will repay you when I return'"* (v.34-35). The Samaritan really made a commitment of time and money and risked his life. There wasn't anything more that he could have done to help the man.

If this man, who barely knew God, could be so kind, what about us? Jesus asked the expert in the law, *"Which of the three do you think acted like a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?"* *"The one who showed mercy to him,"* he replied. Then Jesus told him, *'Go and do likewise'* (v.36-37). Jesus wanted the Bible expert to see that it was important for him to be a neighbor to all in need. Jesus showed the expert this because he knew the law, but did not applied it to himself. Spiritually he had been attacked by the devil and was left helpless alongside the road of life. His works could not save him. God had demanded a perfect life of love and he fell as far short as we do.

We must fight our sinful nature. Outwardly, we can do good things, but it doesn't change our sinful minds and attitudes. Jesus was preaching the law to this man so he would see his inability to save himself. If we gage our own lives by the standard that Jesus set in this lesson, we would see that we do not come close to having a commitment of love as we should or even as much as the Samaritan who helped a stranger no matter what the cost. He was willing to sacrifice all. That is the standard that God expects of us as best neighbors.

Third, only in Jesus can we be the best neighbors. Believing in Jesus and receiving His love is the best way to gain a heart that is devoted to loving and serving others. Like the Samaritan's kindness, Jesus held back nothing to save us from our desperate and helpless condition as sinners. He was willing not only to risk His life, He died to take away all our sins. He suffered our punishment to save us from eternal judgment! He rose from death to offer us eternal life with Him in heaven.

Knowing and having the love of Christ makes all the difference. There is another example of this love in the Old Testament. The prophet Elisha was constantly predicting where an enemy was going to have a surprise attack against Israel. He would tell the king of Israel and they would be ready for the attack. The enemy king was so angry, he sent troops who surrounded Elisha's city. Then God struck the army with blindness and Elisha led them to a city where they were surrounded by Israel's army. Rather than kill them and Elisha was a good neighbor. He gave them a meal and sent them home in peace. The cycle of violence stopped and they never attacked Israel again.

So, this lesson reminds us that God's standard is to be the best neighbor. We must fight against our sinful nature that puts us first! We must keep watching for people in need. And we want to always have Jesus' life and love to motivate us to be the best neighbor. As Jesus lives through us, by faith we will seek to be good neighbors now. And in heaven with Jesus, we all will be best neighbors forever! Amen.