

# Bible Studies for Life: July 24

*Who Is My Neighbor? • Luke 10:25-37*

*By Clay Anthony*



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People full of fear and stress are nothing new, of course. We read of hurting people on every page of Scripture. That knowledge has always been followed by the question of what can be done to help.

There is a famous interaction between Jesus and a scribe recorded only in Luke that ends with an answer to this question, yet the answer is not what the scribe was bargaining for.

First, we must recognize this scribe as being self-serving. He starts by asking a serious question in a selfish manner. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v.25) seems to be an honest question, but did you note the pronoun he used?

What must "I" do, not "we" or "us." He is focusing on himself. This is the same question and attitude faced later by Jesus from another questioner (Luke 18:18).

Why is it self-serving to ask how might one get to heaven? The answer can be found by rereading how this conversation started – Jesus was being tested – and further by seeing how this scribe was attempting to save face (v.29) because he did not like Jesus' answer. Self-serving people never make good neighbors.

Also note how this scribe employs verbal gymnastics to get around Jesus' answer, which was to love God and your neighbor. The scribe knew this was a task he could not perform. Scribes in Jesus' day had but one job: study the Torah and map out boundaries. What was and was not allowed for the Jewish

community came from their written word, and those tasked to write out the handbook on following God were these scribes.

This scribe knew it was permissible to aid his own kind and even those who were sojourning through his area as visitors (Lev. 19), but there were also those that he knew to shun. Those that were not like him and his community fell beyond the boundaries that required his care and attention.

So, he asks a testing question for Jesus but also for himself. Who indeed is considered my neighbor? If Jesus answers wrongly, the scribe will be justified in his selfish attitude toward others while at the same time humiliating Jesus. Those attempting to justify their wrong ways of thinking and living never make good neighbors.

The scribe's neighbor was not the religious leaders with whom he interacted. Priests were required to work two full weeks in Jerusalem per year and then return home. Upon seeing this man in need, the priest was not moved to aid in any fashion.

A Levite, another Temple worker, sees the same man in need and refuses to help. Neither of these men of God exuded any Godlike mindset. They are not examples of people to look up to when you are trying to define who is a good neighbor.

Would Jesus name a Pharisee or a prophet of old to display as a true hero and neighbor to this man in need? No. Jesus turned the conversation on a dime when He mentioned one word: Samaritan.

Words cannot begin to describe the hatred between the Jews and those they considered their half-breed cousins, the Samaritans. Read Luke 9:51-54 or John 4 to see how these two groups reacted to each other. Those who cannot love people unlike them never make good neighbors.

Consider one last character in this scene: the wounded man. All we know of this man is his gender. We have no background

information on him. He was walking to Jericho and was jumped by some robbers and left for dead.

This is a story composed in the mind of Christ, yet it is true to life in every detail. When this man was cared for by the Samaritan, he could not pay him for services. He could not clean and bind his own wounds. He could not walk on his own nor even had the ability to say thank you.

We would label him as helpless. This man was a need that crossed the eyesight of a compassionate Samaritan. This Samaritan did not see a neighbor. He saw him as a need and helped.

Neighbors are not just people; they are needs. Find those needs and you will find your neighbors. "Go and do the same" (v.37).

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