

Explore the Bible: March 7

Neighbors? • Luke 10:25-37

By Laura Lee Leathers



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Back in 1971, musician Barry Manilow wrote a jingle for an advertising campaign of the time. Perhaps you've heard of it: "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there." In 2016, the company changed its slogan to, "Here to help life go right." Another great slogan, but the original is the one ingrained in our memories.

In the Gospel of Luke, sometimes referred to as "The Gospel of the Underdog," we find 10 parables. A parable means to "cast alongside" something else. In this case, it means to come alongside a spiritual truth. Another way to say it is, "An earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

The parable of The Good Samaritan is a familiar one. The main focus: A believer best demonstrates their love for God by extending mercy to others.

The exchange (Luke 10:25-29). A lawyer approached Jesus and put Him to a test by asking, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This individual was probably a scribe. In Luke's writings, these individuals are presented negatively because they rejected John the Baptist and Jesus, and placed the burden of legalism on individuals. They hindered people from knowing the truth about salvation. Therefore, his

question was not a personal inquiry but one which was about Jesus' scriptural orthodoxy.

Jesus, knowing the intentions of this man's heart and true motive, asked him, "What is written in the law?" In our modern language that could be interpreted as, "Give me the book, chapter, and verse." Next, Jesus asks, "How do you read it?" or "Give me your understanding." This is a huge takeaway for us; the Scriptures are the source of truth and not human opinions.

The scribe answers by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Jesus affirms his correct answer and tells him to love God and others now, and he will live. Rather than accept the answer, the learned man shoots back with another question: "Who is my neighbor?"

The story (Luke 10:30-35). Jesus responded with a parable. In this familiar story, we can picture the realistic scenario of a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he is attacked by robbers. He is severely injured and probably would have died without assistance.

Jesus describes three consecutive travelers. First, a priest well-versed in Mosaic law was traveling the same road. However, his lack of understanding of loving God wholeheartedly and loving one's neighbor as oneself did not prompt him into action. Instead, he crossed to the other side of the road.

The second traveler was a Levite. The Levites were descendants of the priestly tribe of Levi who served during the time of the Israelite Exodus, and were known for piety and obedience to the law. He also chose the opposite side of the road.

Jesus' point: The two men knew the necessity of the observance of rituals, but they failed to have compassion for the man in need (see Luke 11:46). "But a Samaritan... had compassion (v. 33)."

Hal Lane in our Explore the Bible Commentary writes, "Compassion is a divine attribute that those who love God seek to emulate. The word literally means 'to suffer with' another person." This compassion, driven by love, moves an individual to provide immediate assistance to the stranger in need.

Ponder the ways the Samaritan provided for this stranger. He bandaged his wounds, poured olive oil and wine upon him, provided transportation, and took care of him at an inn. He arranged for additional care, promising reimbursement for the expenses because he had to leave.

The challenge (Luke 10:36-37). Jesus provided the answer, and now the lawyer needed to do some self-examination. What was his spiritual attitude? Did he truly love God? Did he love his neighbor, or was his love based upon external factors such as ethnicity or social position? The lawyer answered Jesus correctly by stating it was the individual who showed mercy.

We need to ask ourselves the very same questions. Lane writes that the quality of mercy is shown when someone who is strong helps someone who is weak. Jesus taught His disciples that mercy is an attribute of those who are saved and are part of the kingdom of God (see Matt. 5:7).

Reaching and helping others requires seeking God's help to overcome prejudices and have a discerning spirit. Loving our neighbor is a part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Most importantly, remember He first loved us and our love for others "is an act of worship and gratitude to God who first loved us" (Lane).

Is this ingrained in your memory? "Like a good neighbor, I will be there."

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