

Who Is My Neighbor?

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BIG SANDY, Texas—When Jesus walked the earth, it was typical of religious representatives to ask Him questions to test him. One such occurrence happened in Matthew 22:35, when a lawyer brought forth such a question.

The question was: “Which is the greatest commandment in the law?” (verse 36).

He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second one is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” (verses 37-39, NIV).

Enlightening parable

In Luke 10:25, Jesus is asked: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

His answer was: “What is written in the law and how do you read it? (verse 26).

The man replied: “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 love your neighbor as yourself” (verse 27).

Jesus commented: “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live” (verse 28).

Then the man asked: “Who is my neighbor?” (verse 29).

Jesus proceeded to give a parable about four individuals—a victim, a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan.

- The victim was robbed during a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho. (We assume that he was a Jewish man because the parable mentions the helper as a Samaritan, and history reveals that Jews and Samaritans did not get along. See John 4:9.)
- The priest and the Levite ignored the victim, instead of helping him.
- The Samaritan helped the victim.

After Jesus told the parable, He asked: “Which of these three [priest, Levite or Samaritan] do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robber?” (verse 36).

The expert of the law replied: "The one who had mercy on him" (verse 37).
Jesus replied: "Go and do likewise" (also verse 37).

Personal application

When I have read the parable, I have wondered: "Who am I in this parable?"
My human nature immediately said: "The Good Samaritan."

But a small voice inside of me caused me to question if that is really true.

After prayerful study, I realized I was or had been everyone in the parable.

- At times, I was the victim. Although I have never been physically abused, I have been wounded—by gossip, harsh words and innuendo.
- At times, I have also been the priest and the Levite. In those situations, I have been the "Christian" who had all the answers, but didn't have time for those who thought differently from me.
- God in His love, mercy and grace is teaching me to be a Good Samaritan.

Seeing the big picture

That beautiful parable has influenced me to ask myself: Who is my neighbor?

And the answer was wonderful—my neighbor is everyone with whom I come into contact.

We live in an evil world and we have to display wisdom and discretion.

But we do not have to be judgmental about different affiliations—whether those differences are religious, gender, race, political, social or economic status or appearance.

We are to love, care, encourage, forgive, have mercy and assist in any way we can toward those who come into our lives.

When we do this, we fulfill the second great commandment. And, in doing so, we also fulfill the first great commandment—to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind.

The two commandments are tied together. You can't do one without the other. As Jesus said in Matthew 22:40: "All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments."

May God help us to be Good Samaritans and to love our neighbors as ourselves.