

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Who & How to Love

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Series: Plot Twist
Luke 10:25-37

BIG IDEA – JESUS SHOWS US WHO TO LOVE & HOW TO LOVE

It's that time of year where we're celebrating the holidays. I mean, Americans and our holidays. We put them all together. First there was Halloween. Those of you who are pagans out there, I'm sure you celebrated that holiday. Then there is Thanksgiving coming up, and then there's Christmas, and then there's New Year's, and then everyone is depressed until spring break. That's how that works.

At the end of the year and the beginning of a new year, we like to do something special. If you've been around for a while, you know about this, are excited about this, and have been a part of this, but some of you (maybe many of you) are new, so I want to let you know... What is that card called *Hold the Rope*? Well, there are a couple of things behind it.

First, you just need to know this if you're new here. We have an incredibly generous church. Just this past year, our budget grew by a million dollars because of the consistent generosity of the people who call Two Cities Church home. So, by the grace of God, all of our needs are met, so we want to do something on top of that for our ministry partners locally, nationally, and globally.

See, we believe in tithes and offerings. We teach the tithe. We're not ashamed of that. We teach the tithe...10 percent to the local church to expand the kingdom of God. Then on top of the tithe, the Bible talks about offerings. If you go to the Old Testament, there are a lot of offerings. We call this the *Hold the Rope offering*.

Now, why do we do that? Well, there was this guy named William Carey. You should read about him sometime. He's one of the most famous missionaries who ever lived. He went to India years and years ago. Nowadays when people go to India, it's still a big deal, but they get on a plane and travel 15 or 18 hours. (I've done this.)

When people become missionaries and go to India, what they do is they say goodbye to their family, and then when they land in India, they FaceTime them. Thank God for technology. Here's what happened back then. They didn't get on a plane, and it didn't take 18 hours. They got on a boat, and it took several months, and they packed their casket. That was very common. Missionaries packed the casket to go, "I'm probably not coming home. I'm probably going to be buried on the mission field."

Well, William Carey was a little bit afraid to go to India (maybe you would be too) and to never come home and all this. So, he looked at his best friend. He had a best friend named Andrew Fuller. Think of *your* best friend. He said, "Hey, I'm scared, and going to India feels like going into a deep, deep well, but I will go into the well if you will hold the rope." What that meant was, "Andrew, I'm going to need you to stay stateside and raise money for my ministry the rest of your life."

So, we just said, "What would it look like for us to hold the rope?" We do this locally, nationally, and globally. We do this locally because we love and want to serve and want to bless our city. Here's the truth: most nonprofits in our city, like the Forsyth prison ministry, like Samaritan Ministries, like Bethesda ministry... I could name many, many ministries. They will never be self-sustaining. Why? Because they minister to people who could never pay them back.

So, what we want to do is we want to call Forsyth Ministries... By the way, don't tell them. We're just like, "Hey, can we shoot a video?" They don't know we're going to give them a gift. We're going to give them a significant gift. Not only that. We're going to buy every prisoner a Bible. We're going to do a lot, depending on your generosity, so we're very excited about it.

The second thing is national ministry. Now, I know it can be the saying of a political party that they want to save America. That's not what the church wants to do. The church wants to save Americans. That's a little different. The way we do that is by planting churches. So, you're going to hear about our church-planting partners and opportunities and strategic giving. It's very exciting. Next week we'll tell you about that.

Thirdly, we're going to increase our global footprint. We don't worship a tribal deity over Winston-Salem. We worship a global God, and we are very excited about some of the opportunities we have with some of our global partners that I'll be telling you about in the weeks to come.

So, here's the ask, guys. Our ask is 100 percent participation. We want every person who calls Two Cities Church home to give a one-time gift above and beyond normal tithes and offerings to the Hold the Rope initiative by the end of the year. Last year,

we raised hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars. By the way, this is all on top of our normal mission giving that's in our budget every year.

Secondly, I want to tell you one other thing...our Christmas services. We're still on schedule to get in this building on December 17. Amen? I was over there twice a day every day looking around. "Who's in charge here?" To whoever was in charge, I said, "Hey, listen. I told our church we're going to be in there on December 17." They said, "We're going to do it."

So, that's what we're hoping for, which means our second service is going to be Christmas Eve. I just want to let you know we're trusting God. We're going to be starting with three services in the building. Some people said, "Are you going to two services?" No, we're going to stay at three services. We're trusting God. Even at Christmas, it's going to be a unique time.

Listen. I don't think I've ever gotten up here and said, "Please invite your friends to church." I think that sounds desperate when a pastor gets up here and says, "Next week is Friends Sunday." We just want to say there are three times a year somebody who otherwise wouldn't come to church will come to church: Easter, Christmas, and when something is not going well in their life.

We have a brand-new building that people are going to be like, "What is that?" plus a cultural moment of Christmas, so we just want to say we think it's an unbelievable opportunity to invite somebody who's far from God and close to you, maybe your one. So, let's take a moment and pray, and then we're going to dive into our *Plot Twist* series.

Lord, I take a moment right now and pray for each person as they have conversations with themselves, with you, and with their spouses. I pray we'd even get our kids involved in this opportunity of generosity. We love our partners locally, nationally, and globally. We're eager to give them a phone call in the new year and, in a culture of bad news, give them some good news about how their ministry is going to be able to go farther faster because of our church and the generosity toward them.

Lord, we continue to pray for our building. We are trying our best with praying and planning toward a December 17 launch and toward the hope to celebrate Christmas in the new building. That's our prayer, Lord. Would you do it? In Jesus' name, amen.

Do you like your neighbors? Don't raise your hand. We've all probably had... Do you have the crazy neighbor, the annoying neighbor, the strange neighbor? (If you invited him, don't raise your hand.) Guys, it's hard to be a good neighbor. Sometimes we can't stand our literal neighbors.

This is why some of you moved out to Davie County and bought 25 acres. You're like, "No more neighbors." This is why that saying, "Fences make good neighbors" is so popular. Well, if you'll turn to Luke, chapter 10, I'm going to talk to you today about the parable of the good neighbor. You probably know it as the *parable of the good Samaritan*. Jesus is going to talk about what it means to be a good neighbor.

See, if you're a Christian here, here's what Jesus teaches us: every Christian is your brother and sister, but every person is your neighbor. He's going to teach us today (this is very simple; this is where we're headed; this is the rest of our time) who to love and how to love. Who do we love? That's a good question to ask. And then how do we love? They'll both be shown in this parable.

I have to talk to us about the parable of the good Samaritan. It is the most famous parable that Jesus tells in Western thought, Western culture. We even have the phrase *Good Samaritan*. Think about this. This is a teeny little town in the Middle East, and we name a ministry in our city Samaritan Ministries, and that's everywhere?

Billy Graham's son, Franklin Graham, had that moment where he said, "Dad, I don't think I'm going to be a worldwide evangelist, but I'd like to start a ministry, and I think I want to call it Samaritan's Purse." If you've ever heard of Operation Christmas Child, that's all under the umbrella of Samaritan's Purse.

In our city, there is a Samaritan Baptist Church. Yes, even the Baptists name their churches after this parable. You may not know this. There are Good Samaritan laws. A Good Samaritan law says if you're in trouble, and I can help you, and I help you, but while I help you I also hurt you, you can't sue me. You're like, "What do you mean?"

Okay. Say you're trying to be healthy, and you're eating too much kale, and you start choking on your kale. I know how some of you are. I don't like to brag, but I am CPR certified, and I do know how to do the Heimlich. So, I see you, and in an act of compassion on my part, I come and do the Heimlich, but I accidentally break one or two of your ribs because I do it too hard. You can't sue me under the Good Samaritan law.

In fact, in eight states (don't worry; North Carolina is not one of them), it goes farther and says if you see somebody in need and don't at least call 911, you could be prosecuted. So, this is a very interesting parable today. But the parables never happen in a vacuum. It's not like Jesus randomly goes, "Hey, everyone gather up. I've got a random story to tell you."

They happen because the disciples are confused about something and Jesus says, "Let me tell you a parable." It happens because he's angry, because Jesus gets angry at the

Pharisees and the religious leaders and their hard hearts. He's like, "I'm going to tell you this parable." Sometimes, and maybe most often, parables are in response to a question.

01 HOW DO I GET TO HEAVEN?

Let's just look at it. Turn with me to verse 25. We'll pick up the story. Here's what it says. ***"And behold, a lawyer stood up..."*** So, Jesus is teaching, and a lawyer stands up. By the way, that's respect. In that culture, you didn't raise your hand; you stood up. Everyone was seated. You stood up to ask a question. ***"...a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"***

I'm going to get to the parable in a few minutes, but it all starts with a conversation with a lawyer. How many of you like to talk to lawyers? I didn't think so. Here's what happens. In fact, this is what's going to happen. This is interesting if you've never seen this before.

The lawyer is going to ask Jesus a question, and then Jesus is going to ask the lawyer a question, and then the lawyer is going to ask Jesus a question, and then Jesus is going to tell a parable (the parable of the good Samaritan) with a question at the end. Now, some people go, "Why does Jesus respond to questions with questions?" Why not? (Some of you will get that on the way home.)

First, I want you to see that the lawyer asked a very good question. Sometimes we ask the right question to the wrong person. Sometimes we ask the wrong question to the right person. The lawyer asked the right question to the right person. There is no more important question than "How do I have eternal life?" That's the question he asked.

That's a more important question than "Who do I marry?" and that's an important question, or "What career path do I choose?" and that's an important question, or "How many kids should we have?" and "Is it time to buy a house?" Those are all really important questions, but there's no more important question than "How do I have eternal life?" We might say it today as "How do I get to heaven?"

Now, here's what's interesting. Every kid asks this question. Every mom and dad knows... I don't know exactly what age, but all of my kids asked this question...5, 6, or 7 years old. They all asked some version of "Where's Great-Grandma?" That's a heaven question. "What happens when we die?"

Here's what happens in America today. Americans never ask this question. Americans are very, very concerned with, "Where will I be financially in 30 years?" Americans are not very concerned with "Where will I be forever in 300 years?"

Here's what's interesting. How does the average American...not a Christian, the average person in Winston-Salem... How do they think you get to heaven? I know the answer. "There's only one thing you have to do to go to heaven: die." That's it. The average American thinks, "I know how I get to heaven. I die." It's not "I'm justified by the death of Christ." It's "I'm justified by my death."

What's interesting is he talks about eternal life. Here we're only concerned about biological life. The Christian has both. Biological life is "Am I working out? Am I exercising? Am I staying healthy?" and all that. We care a lot about our biological life; we don't think very much about eternal life.

02 WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Well, here's what Jesus says. I love how Jesus responds. Look at verse 26. I told you he responds with a question. ***"He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?'"*** I love this. He basically asks, "How do I get to heaven?" "How do I have eternal life?" That's the same question.

Maybe it's helpful, first, to notice what Jesus *doesn't* say. He doesn't say, "Don't worry about it, man." He doesn't say, "Okay. Here's what I need you to do: be a good person. Do more good things than bad things." He doesn't say, "You know what? Actually, it doesn't really matter because, you know, it's all roads lead to God. Do whatever path you want." He doesn't say, "Don't worry about it; just ask God for forgiveness at the end of your life."

What he does instead... This is so simple, but I want you to see this. Jesus points him to God's Word for the answers to his questions. He doesn't point him to culture. "What does cultural opinion say about heaven?" He doesn't point him to tradition. (We're not against tradition.) He doesn't point him to reason or logic. (We're not against reason or logic.) He points him to God's Word.

Now, here's an honest question for us, especially those of us who say we're Christians in here. *Do you believe God's Word has the answers to your problems and other people's problems?* That's a deep conviction you have to have. Here's what I think. I think the Christian should just have the same view of Scripture Jesus has.

You don't have to be able to defend and define *inerrancy*, *inspiration*, and *infallibility*. Those are big, scary words. You just have to say, "You know what? I'm going to be

committed... If I'm going to worship Jesus, I'm going to have the same view of the Bible as Jesus does."

So, how do you know you're growing as a Christian? Well, there are a lot of ways, but one way you know you're growing as a Christian is you're more guided, guarded, and governed by God's Word. That's all you're doing. You turn 21 and ask, "What does God's Word say about alcohol?" You get married and ask, "What does the Bible say about marriage?"

You start dating and ask, "What does the Bible say about sexual purity and relationships?" You have kids and start asking, "What does the Bible say about parenting?" You make money and ask, "What does the Bible say about giving, spending, saving, investing, and contentment?" See, the problem with most of us is we're not, ourselves, believing that God's Word has the answers to our problems.

There's this guy named Bart Ehrman who I'm not a big fan of. You've probably heard of him. He's professor of religion at UNC right down the street, about two hours away. He's an outspoken atheist who teaches New Testament at UNC. I know, strange. What he does is... This is well known. In his class, the first day of class, he says to all of the students in there, because he's a little salty...

He asks, "Who in here would say you believe the Bible?" Now, this is UNC, so you still have a lot of cultural Christians. You still have a lot of people from North Carolina. So, on average, he has 25 to 50 percent of the people who raise their hands and say, "I believe the Bible." He says, "Okay. Put your hands down."

He says, "Those same people who are the 25 to 50 percent of you, how many of you have read the entire Bible just once in your life, cover to cover? You've read every book." He said one to none of the people will raise their hand. He says, "Okay. Just those same people, who has read the entire Harry Potter collection?" Almost everyone's hands go up.

Then he says some version of, "Come on, guys. You don't believe the Bible. If you've been able to follow Harry Potter through Hogwarts..." It's longer. Those seven books of Harry Potter are longer than the Bible. He says, "Guys, let's just be honest. We don't believe it's God's Word, because we wouldn't treat it that way if we did." So, sometimes your critics can be your coaches. They can teach you some things.

Anyway, Jesus asks, "What does the Scripture say?" and then look at what the man says. Verse 27. He gives a great answer. ***"And he answered, 'You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.'"***

Guys, that's an incredible answer. We just take that answer for granted because Jesus says it in a different place and you know this passage. I mean, you go on almost any modern Christian church's website, and it's going to say some version of "Love God. Love each other." "Love God. Love people. Love the world." We take this for granted that they all go together.

It's actually a miracle that this man was able to take something so complex as "How do you define the entire Law, and how do you put it all together?" and was able to bring two commands together, which is Deuteronomy 6:4 (the Shema, "Love the Lord your God") and what appears to be a random verse in Leviticus 19 ("Love your neighbor as yourself"). I don't know if you knew that.

You're like, "The whole 'Love my neighbor as myself...' The first time it shows up is the book of Leviticus?" Anyway, he puts those two together. It's not easy to simplify and summarize things. They talk about simplistic things. *Simplistic* is it's shallow and it's fast and it doesn't hit everything. *Complex* is deep and slow. *Simple* is fast and deep. He just took something and made it very, very simple.

He said, "Okay. I'm supposed to love God with all my heart and love others." Look at what Jesus says in response. We're getting almost to the parable now. ***"And he said to him, 'You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.'"*** Now, Jesus doesn't actually think he *can* do this.

Have you ever loved God with all of your heart and all of your soul and all of your mind and all of your strength? I don't even know if we do that in the middle of passionate worship while we're singing a song, yet alone with our entire life. Then have you ever loved your neighbor as much as you've loved yourself? Let's just admit it. We love ourselves just a little bit more.

If I brought out my iPhone and took a picture of this whole worship center and said, "Guys, check this picture out. I just took this. I'm going to throw it on screen," who are you looking for? Yourself. Okay? Yes, you are. We don't even like to look at pictures we're not in. We're like, "What are all of these random pictures? Where am I?" We love ourselves.

Here's the thing. People don't know how bad they are until they try to be good. What we prefer to do is find somebody who's worse than us, look at their life, and feel good about ourselves. This is why every golfer loves John Daly. Have you ever seen John Daly?

Someone told me recently John Daly has not had a glass of water in 10 years. He looks like it. So, we like to look (he's an extreme version) at somebody who's not doing as

well in life and has a lot of moral failures, and by looking at that person it makes us feel better about ourselves.

So, Jesus goes, "Go ahead and try to do this." Go ahead and try to be a good dad. Go ahead and try to be a good husband. Go ahead and try not to love money. Go ahead and try to be generous. Go ahead and try to love your wife as Christ loved the church. Not until you do that will you realize how bad you are and how wicked your heart is.

03 WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

But the guy is still not getting it, so here's what he says. **"But he, desiring to..."** This is interesting. We get his two motives. His first motive was to test Jesus. His second motive is to... Here it is. **"...desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"** What does it mean to justify yourself? "I want to be right."

We often want to be right instead of forgiven. That's why arguments go way too long. To want to justify yourself is "I want to look good." Here's what he's doing. You have to understand this, because this whole parable will not make sense if you don't understand who it's given to. It's given to you and me, because this is who we are. We are the lawyer. We want to justify ourselves.

Here's what he has asked for. Let me simplify it for you. He says, "Can you give me a rule...?" Religious people love rules. In fact, you know you're in a religious home when there are a lot of rules. You know you're in a religious church when there are rules, and then there are rules about the rules, and there are people who enforce the rules.

Here's the thing about religious people and rules. They want a rule they can keep that's mostly external, and what they like to do is watch themselves obey that rule, feel good about themselves, and judge everyone else who doesn't do that. So, this is a very important concept.

What he's saying is, "All right. Tell me who my neighbor is. Can you give me a very small, very defined person? Then what I'll do is I'll be a neighbor to that person, whatever that means, and then I'll feel really, really good about myself." He wants a law, and what Jesus is going to talk about is love. I'm not saying law and love are necessarily opposed, but the law tends to want to limit things; love tends to want to magnify and expand things.

The law says, "What's the least I have to do?" This is our natural... In our fallen flesh, this is what we want to know. "What's the least amount of time I need to spend with my wife so she's not upset? What's the least amount I have to do as a parent? What's

the least amount I have to give? What's the least amount I have to serve? Just give me a law, and I'll hit the law."

Love never says that. Most of us, at one point in our lives, have been in love. Do you remember what it was like to be in love? You would drive four hours to spend 15 minutes with her or him. You're like, "This doesn't make any sense." That's because love is a maximizer and law is a minimizer.

Look. He's not going to get it, so Jesus is going to have to tell this story. That was all intro to the story. This story is given to a religious person who wants laws and rules instead of wanting to really embrace every person as his or her neighbor. Let me show you this.

04 JESUS TELLS A STORY THAT ENDS WITH A QUESTION

He moves into the story. Here's what he says. Verse 30: ***"Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.'"*** Now it's interesting. Sometimes when Jesus tells a story he'll say, "I'm going to tell you a parable," or sometimes the author will introduce it. "And then Jesus told a parable."

We're actually not told that this is a parable. Now, it doesn't matter either way because the principles and points are the same, but it's interesting that he doesn't say this is a parable. This may have really happened. Either way, the applications and principles will be the same.

What's interesting is he names real places. Obviously, Jerusalem is a real place. Jericho is a real place. This was a 17-mile journey. I've told you before 20 miles is a day's journey, so this is a day's journey. It was a dangerous road. It was right next to the valley of the shadow of death. Have you ever heard of that? Yes, that's in Psalm 23. It was right next to that.

This guy is traveling down this road, and he gets beaten up, left for half dead (which basically means he's unconscious), and all of his clothes are off. Why are we told this? Jesus sets up the story so we can't identify who the man is. We know the least about this guy than anybody else.

How do you know who somebody is? Well, in that culture (and still in our culture today), you'd see how they were dressed. You'd know their status. You'd know their culture. Or, if you couldn't tell there, you'd talk to the person, and depending on the language they were speaking or the accent they had, you'd be like, "Okay. I know who

this person is." The whole point is this guy is just left dead in the ditch, anonymous. We have no idea who it is, and that's the point, because it could be anybody.

Okay. That's the setup to the story. You know that part. Here's what's interesting. **"Now by chance a priest..."** You have to know this. The priests were the spiritual leaders of that time. They were running the worship services. They were overseeing the sacrifices. They were supposed to be the models of what it meant to follow Yahweh. They were supposed to be the ideal citizens. They were who everybody looked up to.

You know what's going to happen, because that's the problem. You know this parable already. But when you're reading this for the first time, it would be like me saying, "There was a man in a ditch, and down the road comes Tim Tebow." You'd be like, "He certainly will do something. If anyone will do something, Tim Tebow will do something." That's what you're supposed to feel. You're supposed to feel like, "This guy is the greatest guy. It's who we look up to."

Okay. Here's what it says. **"Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him..."** You'll see that all three of the people will see him. **"...he passed by on the other side."** You have to know who you are in this story. We are the lawyer and we are the priest.

What the priest does is what we're all at least tempted to do, which is when we see need or pain or other people's problems, we immediately figure out a way to distance ourselves, in the most polite, kind way possible, from that person. I'm not here to beat you up but to build you up, but let's just admit. And this is okay. It really is. I don't know if there's another way.

If we look over our life, many of us will realize that our whole life, maybe not intentionally, has been designed to not interact with people who are in need. Sometimes it's like, "That's why we're not sending the kids to that school...because we don't have to, and we're not going to. We can live in *this* neighborhood and send our kids to *that* school."

This is why people live in the neighborhoods they live in. "This is a safe neighborhood, and that kind of stuff doesn't happen here, and those types of people don't come here." This is why people don't go to certain parts of the city. Most of us can live our entire life and never interact with anybody in need except for that homeless person on Jonestown Road. Even then, we're like, "All right. Lock the doors. Put your sunglasses on. Don't make eye contact."

Now, why didn't he stop? We don't know why he didn't stop. We can only assume based on culture and temperament and his job and different things why he didn't

stop. As I looked at all of the commentators and scholars and what they said, they came up with four different reasons the priest didn't stop. When I read these, I thought, "These are the exact same four reasons we don't stop." So, let me give them to you. Maybe it's not all of these for you, but it's some of them.

Why don't we otherwise get involved and help when we see a need? First, maybe the priest thought, "This is this guy's fault, and I'm not going to help somebody who got themselves in trouble. Maybe this guy was fighting other people. Maybe he picked on these robbers." He doesn't even know that robbers came. "Maybe this guy has been doing drugs, and that's why he's in the pit."

We tend to want to... And there are many reasons for this. We tend to want to simplify people's problems into "It's their fault completely." It's very easy to look at someone and be like... I'll give you a classic example. You see someone. They're homeless. They're on the street, and you're like, "Okay. I know your problem. You're probably addicted to drugs. I know your problem. I know what it is. You're lazy. I know your problem. You don't want to work, and you can't keep a job."

We wish it was that simple. The best definition of poverty I've ever heard is poverty is, at the end of the day, a lack of relationships. I mean, a lot of relationships. You know, you look at somebody, and you go, "Well, where's their mom and dad?" There's lack of relationship there. They have a terrible relationship with money, probably, and maybe they have a terrible relationship with some substance or whatever.

So, the first thing we do is we look at somebody, because it makes us feel better, and we think, "You know what? That person made some horrible decisions, and they're going to have to get themselves out of that," which is the opposite of the gospel. Everything you just sung about, if you're a Christian, is basically we got ourselves into some terrible trouble, and Jesus didn't look at us and say, "Sorry. Your fault. You're going to have to get yourself out of that."

The second reason people didn't stop is safety concerns. Right? Now, it's complex. We have families. The Samaritan is a guy by himself. Here's what the priest would have been thinking. Say he thinks the robbers did get this guy. He thinks, "Well, this guy got beat up by some robbers."

Everyone is traveling on their horse or mule, or whatever, and he thinks, "If I get off my mule, I make myself vulnerable to the surroundings. What if this guy is playing a trick on me? He's acting like he's hurt, but as soon as I get over there, he's going to hurt me. Or what if these robbers are actually pretty smart, and what they did to get even more money was they hurt a guy, and then they left him so that somebody would have compassion and be naïve and come out, and they'll hurt him too?"

We'll see this. There's always the "What will happen to me if I do something?" What's going to be different is the Samaritan is going to ask, "What's going to happen to *him* if I *don't* do something?"

The third thing is busyness. I mean, priests are important. It's hard for us to imagine this, because we don't view ministry the same way today as they did back then, but the priests were the leaders. They were the celebrities in the culture. They were the academic elites. They were the ones who had good salaries and good incomes.

So, this guy is very important. How many of us think some version of that? "I don't have time for this. I've got meetings to get to, and I've got places to be. I mean, I'm heading from Jerusalem down to Jericho. I don't have time. Somebody less important and less busy than me can handle him."

Then the fourth is his religious duties and religious traditions hindered him from helping. How do we know that? Because he came from Jerusalem to Jericho. There was a Jewish tradition that said if you touched a dead body, you would be ceremonially unclean for seven days.

If he touches this body, according to Jewish tradition, he has to go back up to the temple, so it's going to take him more time, more energy, and more money. So, there's part of you that you hear it and go, "Okay. He's just like us, and I understand why he wouldn't do this."

So, that's the first thing. This guy passes by, but then we hear a second person. I want you to see this. Verse 32: "***So likewise...***" Everything Jesus tells us he puts in there for a reason. "***...a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him...***" It's the exact same story. A Levite comes and sees him. Here's what it says. "***...passed by on the other side.***"

So, why a priest and a Levite? What you have to know about a Levite is a Levite is a JV priest. A Levite is to a priest what a mall cop is to a real cop. The mall cop has the Segway and the flashlight. "Please get to a heavily lit area quickly." This is actually really important. What we know about this, what's called, the *Way of Blood* that I told you about, this 17-mile road...

Though it was very dangerous, and though there could be robbers on the sides, at any point in the road you could usually see three to four miles down the road. So, the reason Jesus is telling this story, and what everybody who was listening for the first time would have heard and understood, is the Levite saw the priest pass this man by.

What's the point of this? I hope you'll get this. This is very important. Sometimes when we don't do something, when we aren't faithful, when we aren't doing ministry

and mission, when we aren't loving people, we make it more difficult for the generation that's coming behind us.

The Levite could say something like, "Well, I don't make as much money as the priest. If the priest can't afford to help this guy, I can't. I don't have the flexibility in my schedule that he does. I don't have the status to explain this if someone doesn't like what I'm doing."

See, when we are not faithful in an area of our lives, we introduce struggles into the generation that's coming behind us. How many parents are making it more difficult for their kids to be faithful to Christ because of their lack of faithfulness? I'll tell you... Again, people think things they don't articulate out loud.

Someone could say, "Man! If Mom and Dad, who made a lot more money than me... I don't know if I'll ever make that much money or it'll be a long time before I make that much money. If they can't give, there's no chance I can give." "Mom and Dad couldn't stay married. How am I going to stay married?"

People don't often make the connection. This literally happened in our church. This was a long time ago, but we had this couple come up to us, and they were so upset, so we met with them. They said, "We're so upset." They had an adult son who was in our church. "We're so upset. Our son is not in a Community Group. He doesn't want to get in a Community Group."

I'm thinking to myself... Because I knew this. I thought, "You guys aren't in a Community Group." It was like, "A-W-K-W-A-R-D. Awkward moment, you and me." That's what I was about to feel. Like, this is about... "Do I right now point out to this couple that they're not in a Community Group, because it's so obvious that they haven't..."

People wonder, "How does generational sin happen? Does it go from one person to the other person quietly at night while everybody is sleeping?" No. The love of money is passed down when a young man or woman watches their parents value materialism and consumerism for 20 years.

So, the Levite passes by. The Levite says, "You know what? If the priest can't do anything, I can't do anything." Well, then you know what happens. Here's the famous story. Here's the guy. **"But a Samaritan..."** I can't explain to you how much the Jews hated Samaritans. If this was a movie, when he said, "But a Samaritan..." the music to *Jaws* would start. That's what would happen, 100 percent.

What's interesting is theology is on the front page of your newspaper every day. It has always been that way, but especially right now. What's happening in the Middle

East with Hamas and Israel and all this... What you realize is people, not just in the Middle East, but people in the Middle East have hated each other for as long as there has been human civilization.

So, you just need to think about this and think about how much the Jews hated the Samaritans and the Samaritans hated the Jews. It's too long of a story to tell you, but basically, at the end of the day, there was this group that intermarried with the Assyrians a long time ago in the Old Testament, and the Jews hated them for it. They thought they compromised. They were half-Gentile and half-Jew. They didn't fit either place, and they were hated by both. So, that's who the Samaritans are.

Look at what it says here. ***"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him..."*** So, we have the same beginning to all three guys. Oh, here's the difference. Here's the one difference. ***"...he had compassion."*** Okay. I don't know if there's anyone in America who hates each other as much as the Jews hated the Samaritans and the Samaritans hated the Jews.

You might say the extreme Democrats and extreme Republicans and their hatred toward each other, maybe. You might say Duke and UNC fans. I mean, I don't know. But if I could bring this down, this is what it would be like. Say the biggest UNC fan ever... I don't know what his name would be. He loves UNC. This is how Jesus would tell the parable today.

That UNC fan is beaten, his jersey is torn, and his ball is deflated. He's lying in a ditch, and Roy Williams walks by. If you don't know who that is, he's a former coach at UNC. Roy Williams saw him, and he passed by on the other side. You'd go, "Why would he?"

It just happened that right after Roy Williams, Michael Jordan came, who played for UNC and loves UNC. He also passed by on the other side. But then Coach K was walking, and he bandaged up his wounds, pumped up his basketball, and put his jersey back on. We'd be like, "No!" That's what this is saying.

05 WHAT THE SAMARITAN DID

So, let's look at verses 33-34 and see what the Samaritan did. He's to be the model example. ***"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion."*** The priest and the Levite saw a body; the Samaritan saw a person and a soul. ***"He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him."***

The two attributes that define the Good Samaritan and, I think, define a good neighbor are *compassion* and *courage*. You know what compassion is. That's a deep feeling where you're able to relate to where that person is, and you think something like, "What if that was me?" or "What if that was my son?" or "What if that was my daughter? What if that was my sister? What if that was my mom?" You have this compassion. It's emotional.

Some of us actually need to pray for that more. "Lord, would you open up my eyes so that when I see somebody in need I don't just get angry, frustrated, and think about how I can avoid it but I actually start to care for them?" So, it says he had compassion. True compassion always leads to practical care. He got off his mule or his horse, it says, and went to him.

You have to understand that with most needs, they're not going to come to us. There are some people who are going to come to us, and they're going to say, "My marriage is falling apart. I made some mistakes financially. My kid is really breaking my heart. I'm addicted." I mean, there will be that, but a lot of times, you're going to see them, and they're not going to be in a condition to come to you and say, "I need help." You're going to need to go to them.

The second thing is he has courage, obviously. Everything I said about the priest and the Levite applies to him. He's busy. He could get hurt. He doesn't know what's going to happen. He comes, and he does something we often don't want to do. He gets personally involved. You think about it. You read all of the things. He bandaged up his wounds. I read the commentaries on this.

How did he bandage up his wounds? Well, he didn't have a first aid kit with him. The way you bandaged up wounds back then was you ripped your shirt or your tunic. So, he would have less so that this guy could have more. Not only that... Oil and wine. I mean, that's celebration. That's a good time. That's luxury. That's extra stuff you could do for yourself. Oh, some of the luxury he's not going to be able to enjoy so that he can help this man heal.

Not only that. We don't know exactly the animal he was on, but most likely... Most animals back then couldn't carry two people. What happens when you throw a guy who's half dead on your animal? You're walking. So, we have all this beautiful imagery that, "Wait a second. We're going to have to..." Here's the phrase. I already said it. We're going to have to get personally involved with our time, our energy, and our money.

When I was growing up, my dad used to always say it's very easy to spend OPM (other people's money). We're so glad, as a church, to do so many generous things, but it's amazing how many people think the church should do everything. "There's an

under-resourced middle school ministry in this part of town, and I think the church should give to it."

Now the new game... I've been pastoring now for seven years. It took me about two years to learn this game, but my favorite game to play is "Tag, you're it." Not everyone else likes to play that game, but I love that game. You know, "We should build houses and start this ministry." "I agree. Tag, you're it." Then all of a sudden they say, "Oh, no, no. Not me. I wanted to just lie around on Saturdays, but I want the church to do something."

What's interesting...this is another important thing...is he takes him to an inn. What is an inn? An *inn* is a place where there are systems and structures and staffing for the person to get the long-term, comprehensive care they need. What is that? It's the church.

When you drive by our new building, you can think "Home and hub for ministry." I love it. We've been using that language. You can think "Ark," a safe place, like Noah's ark. You can think "Lighthouse." I love that. Maybe also think, "Inn." It's a place where people can come and get the comprehensive long-term care...the help, the hope, and the healing that they need.

In fact, that's what you do. As a Christian, you're living your life where you live, learn, work, and play, and you find someone in a ditch and go, "All right. I'm going to have to get personally involved in this. All right. Here we go. Here's my money. Here's my time. Here's my energy." Then you bring that person to a place, the local church, where they can get comprehensive care.

Now, sometimes... The church is the big inn. Sometimes the church says, "You know what? We're not the best inn for that. We know another inn in town." This is why we always think about organizations, not situations. There are whole ministries in our city... I already mentioned Samaritan Ministries and Bethesda Center. We're not reinventing the wheel as Two Cities Church.

We're like, "Okay. There's a ministry that has been around for decades that knows how to deal with homelessness and hunger, so we're going to help that person get to that inn." By the way, you can tell a person really wants help if they're willing to go to an inn. I did ministry before I was here in a downtown church in Durham, and every day we would have people knock on our door.

They would always ask for a bunch of... "Can I have money? Can I have food? Can I have [this]?" As soon as we said, "Would you like to go somewhere where we could help you long term?" they said, "No." Oh! When you want to go to the inn, that's when

you'll really get help. Notice also... Let's go here. I want you to see what he says. Verse 34:

"He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'"

He gets financially invested and involved. Two denarii, depending on the quality of that inn, would let the man stay at that inn for one to two months. Here's maybe the most interesting thing. The guy, as far as we understand in the story... One of the most humbling things about this Samaritan story is he is going to remain completely anonymous.

This guy is going to wake up and be like, "How did I get to this inn?" I don't know how it worked back then, but he's going to go down to the lobby and go to the front desk, and they're going to be like, "Yeah, some guy... He's not here anymore. He brought you here. He also gave me some money. You can stay here for a long time. Don't worry about it."

Nothing will push on your flesh as much as doing something and nobody else knowing about it...giving and nobody knows, serving and nobody knows, praying and nobody knows. We love to watch ourselves do things. We love to have other people watch us do things.

Well, here's an interesting thing to think about in the story. Why did Jesus make the Samaritan the hero? If he wanted to teach the lawyer a lesson, why isn't the third person the lawyer? It's like, "Hey, there's a priest, and there's a Levite, but look! You could be this hero."

It's because the lawyer is not the hero of the story, and you and I are not the heroes of the story. We are, if you haven't figured it out already, the priest and the Levite. More than that, we are the guy half naked, beat up by sin, Satan, and selfishness, lying in a ditch. Why a Samaritan? Because Jesus wanted to communicate a powerful truth: *somebody who looks nothing like you is the one who will save you.*

Somebody who comes from a faraway place is the one who's going to save you. Somebody who was your enemy is going to be your friend. Here's what Jesus is trying to communicate. What if your only hope in life was unexpected, extravagant love from somebody whom you didn't deserve it? That's the picture of the gospel.

Jesus is not just the Good Samaritan; he would be the Great Samaritan who gets personally involved, who gave his time, his money, his energy, and himself

completely for us and for our salvation. I'm just telling you the only way... I mean, I could try to beat you guys up for 40 minutes and say, "You've got to help homeless people, and you've got to help your neighbor, and you've got to..." That's not going to last.

The only way you're going to be the type of neighbor you need to be long term is you need to realize that Jesus Christ first did all of this for you. He didn't pass by on the other road, but he had compassion and courage and went to you and brought help, hope, and healing.

06 HOW CAN YOU BE A NEIGHBOR?

So, here's how he ends. He ends with a question. I told you it's question, question, question, question. Verse 36: ***"Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man..."*** It's interesting. He was asking, "Who's my neighbor?" Jesus is saying, "Who can you be a neighbor to? I'm flipping the question. I'm expanding it."

"...who fell among the robbers?" He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise.'" In other words, Jesus says, "You don't need a new rule; you need an entirely new reality." You need to realize what God has done for you in Christ, and that's going to so transform your heart and give you such an energy you're going to be able to love other people.

It's interesting. Martin Luther, that famous monk who was part of starting the Reformation, when he read this passage... He had a way with words and a way with teaching. He read this passage, and he said to his church at the end, "Do you know what your role is? You need to be Christ to your neighbor."

He believed in the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ. He was saying, "WWJD?" 500 years early. He was saying what you should ask in a situation is not "What does the law require?" but "What does love require?" and "What does it look like for me to be Christ to my neighbor?"

We spent an entire initiative talking about being gospel messengers, and we thank God for that. Gospel messengers. "Hey, one risk in one relationship at a time. The gospel goes forward with one conversation. Share the gospel with who's far from God and close to you." That's being a gospel messenger. We also want to be gospel neighbors.

Gospel neighbors say, "I'm not just going to tell you about Christ; I'm going to love you like Christ." What we want to have is not just gospel doctrine. Gospel doctrine is

"We have all the right thinking about Jesus, the cross, the empty tomb, salvation, and sin." That's gospel doctrine.

So many churches have gospel doctrine, and they don't have gospel culture. Gospel culture is "Your life can fall apart here." Gospel culture is "We forgive each other." Gospel culture is "We give grace." Gospel culture is "I see you as a sinner who needs God's grace, and I understand myself as a sinner who needs God's grace."

So, as we close, I want you to think about your neighbor. Your neighbor may be your spouse. Your neighbor may be your kids. The problem with us is we often want to love the ideal person, not the real people in front of us. There are certain people who need us to go to them.

Lord, would you help us to be gospel messengers and gospel neighbors? Would you help us to get personally involved? Would you help us to not be like the priest and the Levite who are boring, predictable, selfish, and uninterested and have forgotten that ministry and mission are about people, about loving people, praying for people, and reconciling people to each other. Lord, would you help us to be gospel neighbors, as you were first and foremost a gospel neighbor to us? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.