

Refugees and the Bible

Welcoming the stranger

Session 4: Who is my neighbour?

Pray

Spend some time in prayer dedicating your discussion and reflections to God.

Watch

Part 4: Who is my neighbour?

(Download from biblesociety.org.uk/refugeesandthebiblefilms)

Discuss the clip. How do you react to what was said? Do you agree with it? Is there anything you disagree with?

Have a look at Leviticus 19.17-8:

Don't hold grudges. On the other hand, it's wrong not to correct someone who needs correcting. Stop being angry and don't try to take revenge. I am the Lord, and I command you to love others as much as you love yourself.

and Leviticus 19.33-34:

Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself. Remember, you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

What do you think is meant in that context by 'love others as much as you love yourself'? And why do you think they added 'treat them [foreigners] as well as you treat citizens'? What would this have meant for them in practice?

Short note: the word translated 'alien' in the NRSV; 'stranger' in the ESV; and 'foreigner' in the NIV is a Hebrew word that means a sojourner or someone who stays somewhere temporarily (though how temporary is not defined).

Refugees and the Bible. Welcoming the stranger.

Session 4: Who is my neighbour?

Read

The story of the parable of the Good Samaritan is set in the context of a conversation between Jesus and an expert in the law. Notice the whole context of the story as you read:

Ask someone to read the passage out loud slowly, leaving enough gaps for reflection; you might also want to leave a few minutes for silent reflection at the end.

Luke 10.25-37 (Contemporary English Version)

²⁵ *An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to have eternal life?"*

²⁶ *Jesus answered, "What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?"*

²⁷ *The man replied, "The Scriptures say, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.' They also say, 'Love your neighbours as much as you love yourself.'"*

²⁸ *Jesus said, "You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life."*

²⁹ *But the man wanted to show that he knew what he was talking about. So he asked Jesus, "Who are my neighbours?"*

³⁰ *Jesus replied:*

As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead.

³¹ *A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. ³² Later a temple helper came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went by on the other side.*

³³ *A man from Samaria then came traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him ³⁴ and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return."*

³⁶ *Then Jesus asked, "Which one of these three people was a real neighbour to the man who was beaten up by robbers?"*

³⁷ *The teacher answered, "The one who showed pity."
Jesus said, "Go and do the same!"*

Unpack

- The summary of the law cited by the lawyer in this passage was a common one in the first century and can be found in a number of Jewish texts. It combines a law from Deuteronomy with one from Leviticus and emphasises the vertical and horizontal expectations of the law: towards God and towards one another.
- In the story the Priests and the Levites were officials in the temple. The Priests undertook all the official functions in the Temple, particularly the sacrifices; the Levites were Temple musicians and guards. Both Priests and Levites served one month in twelve in the temple and had to be pure (i.e. not defiled by things like dead bodies). If they thought the injured man was dead then touching him would have complicated their once-a-year service in the temple.
- Samaritans were close neighbours of the Jews. There is debate about precisely who they were but it is often thought that they were the descendants of the Jews from that part of Israel that had been conquered by the Assyrian empire in the 8th century BC, and whose population had subsequently been mixed with that of the Assyrians. They had the Torah – though no more of the Hebrew Bible. They worshiped on Mount Gerizim rather than in Jerusalem. They still exist today, though only a few hundred remain and still sacrifice as they have always done. It was the common heritage though expressed differently that lay at the heart of the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The enmity was so great that most Jews would have taken a long detour to avoid travelling through their territory (though noticeably Jesus did not).

Reflect

- The commands in Leviticus and in Luke all expect us to love others as we love ourselves. The problem is that sometimes it is easier to love others than to love ourselves. What do you think it means to love yourself? How good at it are you?
- If Jesus were to tell this parable today – who might take the role of the Good Samaritan? You might have a range of answers to this question!
- What does it mean in practice to love your neighbour? Notice that Jesus' parable about 'love' involved action and didn't comment on 'attitude' – is there anything to learn from this?
- Is there anything that you have explored in your discussion today that you would want to apply to the question of how we think about and/or welcome refugees?
- As this is the final session, also spend some time reflecting back on the previous three sessions. Is there anything you will take away with you? In terms of your questions about refugees is anything unresolved or still troubling you? Discuss these as a group.

Pray

Spend time in prayer committing all that you have discussed to God. Bring to him in prayer those who are wondering whether to flee their country; those who are currently seeking safe haven and those who are in refugee camps in various places around the world. Add your prayers to our digital prayer tree at biblesociety.org.uk/prayertree