

The Good Samaritan: are we good neighbours?

Talk outline

Purpose: To help your congregation to live out the 'greatest commandments' by reflecting on the parable of the Good Samaritan and their own priorities.

Resource: Show the Good Samaritan video. You don't need to introduce this – allow people to watch it and draw their own conclusions.

Reading: Luke 10:25-37 (GNB)

²⁵A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

²⁶Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

²⁷The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind"; and 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' "

²⁸"You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live."

²⁹But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?"

³⁰Jesus answered, "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead.³¹It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side.³²In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by, on the other side.³³But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity.³⁴He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.³⁵The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.' "

³⁶And Jesus concluded, "In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by the robbers?"

³⁷The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him."

Jesus replied, "You go, then, and do the same."

Sermon / talk outline:

- 1) **How did your listeners feel watching the video?** When were they last in a similar situation? Give a moment's reflection.
- 2) **Who is our neighbour?**

The teacher was asking Jesus, "Whom do I technically have to help in order to fulfil the Law?" Just Jews? My geographical neighbours? How many?

Today, living in big cities and communicating across the world, we perhaps have less of a sense of local community. Who do we think of as our neighbours today?

- A recent poll conducted by the Bible Society asked people in the UK whether they would lend their mobile phone to a stranger in the street who said they needed to make an urgent call. The answer depended on who was asking. While 39% said they would lend their phone to an elderly woman, and 26% to a professional woman in a suit, only 15% would do the same thing for a woman they thought was homeless.

Like the teacher who questioned Jesus, do we only recognise people who are 'like us' as our neighbours? Do we weigh up a person's background, worth or trustworthiness before we help them?

- The Bible Society poll found that only 19% of people thought that being a modern day 'Good Samaritan' involved doing good for someone you didn't like or wouldn't normally associate with.

But what's the point of Jesus' story?

Jesus is talking to a teacher of the law. The first two people in the story – a priest and a Levite – are religious people like the teacher; experts in knowing about God. They were also technically 'neighbours' of the injured man, being fellow Jews. You would expect them to do the right thing.

The teacher would have considered the third man – the Samaritan – to have known nothing about God. He would have thought him a heretic who believed all the wrong things, and he certainly wasn't considered the 'neighbour' of the Jewish man in the story.

But who actually obeys the 'greatest commandment' in this story? It's not the religious experts – it's the person who helped someone very different from himself; an enemy even.

Jesus is saying that there are no categories or rules about who we should help; every fellow human being is our neighbour. The Samaritan is a good example of what it looks like to really love our neighbour.

3) **Why is it difficult to act like the Good Samaritan?**

Why don't the priest or the Levite help the man in the story, even though they know all about God?

The video shows that not much has changed. Why don't we always help the person in need?

What are some of the concerns that stop us? *You might want to expand on some of these points:*

- a) Safety and security. *The Bible Society asked people why they might not help a stranger – the top two reasons given were ‘If I might get hurt’ and ‘If I felt like I didn’t trust the person’. The priest and the Levite may have been scared to linger on the dangerous road. They could get robbed too. Perhaps it’s a trap... Are we too suspicious? Do we worry that people will be ungrateful or take advantage of us? Does it matter if they do?*
- b) Reputation. *The priest and the Levite could have become ritually unclean by touching the man if he was dead. But were they in touch with God’s priorities? Do we want to be friends with the awkward person who gets bullied, or the ‘bad’ person? The video suggests we find it easier to help someone who is ‘like us’ – the well-dressed man who’s lost his wallet rather than the foreign refugee. Do we have trouble recognising our ‘neighbour’?*
- c) Time. *We often consider ourselves to be busy and in a hurry – does this stop us noticing and helping people in need around us? Do we have time and space in our lives to help the people in front of us? If not, do we need to make a change?*
- d) Possessions / money / personal cost. *The priest and Levite might not have wanted to get involved as the man was clearly badly hurt and helping him would involve a lot of effort and expense. Does protecting our stuff and our comfortable way of life take priority? Do we think ‘it’s not my problem’ instead of taking responsibility?*

The priest and the Levite are so wrapped up in their own concerns that they don’t recognise the man as a neighbour or brother but only see him as a victim or problem – not somebody like them. Their feelings are not touched.

In short, it’s hard for us to empathise and respond when we care more about what happens to **us** than about what is happening to the **person in need**. We’re not recognising our neighbour and loving them as ourselves.

4) Why does the Samaritan help?

The Samaritan was able to overcome any concerns about:

- a) His personal safety. *Lingering on the dangerous road.*
- b) His reputation. *What would other Samaritans think of him helping a Jew?*
- c) His time. *Verse 34 shows he went out of his way and cared for him all day.*
- d) His money and independence. *Verse 35 shows he spent a good sum and took personal responsibility for the man’s recovery.*

How was he able to do this? Verse 33 says: *when he saw him, he took pity on him.*

Quote: Martin Luther King Jr. said:

“The first question the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But ... the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

The difference is compassion. Compassion means ‘to suffer **with**’. The Samaritan engaged his feelings. He empathised, putting himself in the stranger’s shoes and imagining his suffering. He felt for him as a fellow human being – even though they were very different people.

The Samaritan's compassion enabled him to think more about the stranger's needs than his own needs in that moment – to love his neighbour the way he loved himself.

The woman in the video who offered the refugee a spare room expressed her compassion when she took action and said:

*"I'm gonna take a risk, because I don't know you, you're a complete stranger but **my heart goes out** to people who are in a situation like this – you know, it's not your fault and I believe in helping people."*

She knew what she believed and her compassion compelled her to put it into action even though it required her to take some risks.

5) Conclusion

Who is our neighbour? The story shows us that every fellow human being is our neighbour – no matter their background, how different they are, or any preconceptions we might have about them.

Jesus was marked by his compassion for people. Compassion enables us to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes and care in a way that prompts action, even when it's costly.

It's not easy to really love our neighbour! We need to ask God to make us compassionate like he is. We need his help to engage our hearts, not just our heads, when we see someone in need.

Suggested response / prayers:

Pray for help to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our strength and with all our minds, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Pray for God to give us compassion and to open our eyes to see everybody as our neighbours.

Pray for help overcoming the obstacles that are biggest for us, whether it's our security, reputation, prejudices, time or possessions.

Is there a situation you are already aware of where you could show love to someone in need? If so, pray about it.