

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

A 12 Week Devotion
Luke 10:25-37

Youth Becoming Leaders 2024
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YOUTH BECOMING LEADERS
High School Christian Leadership and Global Transformation Institute

ASBURY UNIVERSITY
*Academic Excellence & Spiritual Vitality*

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# INTRODUCTION & INSTRUCTIONS




**Sometimes there are stories you've heard all your life, stories that are so familiar you know them by heart. Often with these stories, they become so familiar, so commonplace, that we can miss the beauty of them. Such is the Parable of the Good Samaritan.**

During YBL, we talked about this parable for ten days. Speakers preached on it during the evening worship services. Brilliant teachers instructed on the topic of "Who is my neighbor?" And we examined our own communities to discover what needs are present and how we might be a part of meeting those needs.

For the next 12 weeks, you and your mentee will continue to look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan through a series of 12 devotions. "But why?" you ask. "Isn't this a bit of overkill? Won't this do the very thing you talked about—make it so familiar that we miss the beauty of the story?"

We strongly believe that sometimes the reason something becomes commonplace is precisely that we fail to keep looking for new themes, new angles on the story, and new ways of seeing God at work. Our goal is that the next 12 weeks will serve as just that—a collaborative effort between the YBL participant, the mentor, and the leaders of YBL (who wrote these devotions) as you continue to ask and answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" For each of the 12 devotions, we'd like you to read through the devotion individually and answer the questions.



# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

We want to encourage you to write out your answers. Then, when you come together, use the questions and answers as a guide for your time together. You don't have to always agree on things. In fact, you sometimes won't. That's OK. What is important is how you engage each other in this process and that you take the Scripture passage with all of its implications seriously. Part of biblical interpretation is to recognize that when we study Scripture together in community, we often arrive at different ways of reading and interpreting it than when we do it alone.

Therefore, it is important that we read it individually and seek to interpret it and understand its implications for our lives. But then we also must bring those interpretations and implications to the community and seek clarity together on what the passage means. When we do this, we believe that the Spirit helps correct error and points us in the right direction as we attempt to now live into this new understanding.

As you work through the devotions, you may encounter new ways of thinking about this parable than you've previously discovered. We believe that God's truth is always relevant, and that no matter how many times we may have read a passage, God still has new truth for us to ponder and new implications for us to live out. Only as we open ourselves up to this possibility can God speak to us through those passages we've read or heard spoken on countless times, such as the parable we are studying over the next 12 weeks.

Please know that you both are in our prayers as you begin this journey. May God's wisdom enfold you, the Holy Spirit's peace surround you, and Jesus' grace overwhelm you as you work together to discover what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

# WEEK One

To best understand the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we have to understand the context of where this story falls. As this story is one Jesus tells, we need to recognize the events that were occurring that led up to this parable. Read out loud Luke 9:51-10:24.

In Luke 9:51 and following, we find Jesus and his disciples on their way to Jerusalem. While Jesus knows what will happen when he gets there, the disciples are still clueless (even though Jesus has told them several times about what will transpire). To get there, they intended to travel through a Samaritan village. Jesus sent some messengers ahead of them to get things ready, but the messengers were not welcomed. Two disciples decide this in unacceptable and ask Jesus if it's alright to call down fire on this Samaritan village. Instead, Jesus rebukes them and they go to a village that will welcome them.

As they journeyed along, Jesus encounters three different men, each of whom has the opportunity to follow Jesus. However, all three end up walking away when Jesus tells them the true cost of following him.



# WEEK One

In chapter 10:1-24, we find Jesus sending out the 72 to spread the gospel. Just as he did with the three men in chapter 9, Jesus tells his followers that to follow Him will mean giving up much. They are to take nothing with them, and instead depend entirely on the goodness of God to supply their needs.

After their adventures, these followers of Jesus return, rejoicing over how things went. However, Jesus reminds his followers that while they have been given authority, this authority comes only from God. Then we finally come to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Why does it come at this place in the narrative?

Let me suggest that the primary focus in the preceding stories has been on discipleship. Specifically, Jesus has been emphasizing that those who follow Him must embody the word of God.

As you study the Parable of the Good Samaritan over the next 11 weeks, always keep in mind that this parable is part of Jesus' larger discussion of what it means to be his follower. True discipleship, according to Jesus, is entering into the harvest field of those around us (Luke 10:2) and encountering the other with the love of God. It is seeing the other not as people to call fire down on because we disagree with them, but to continue to share the gospel with the other in such a way that not only do they encounter the risen Christ through us, but that we become the hands and feet of Jesus to those around us.

Discipleship, according to Luke, is about seeing others as Jesus sees them, and then responding accordingly.

# WEEK One

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. Prior to reading this devotion, how would you have defined "discipleship"?

2. How do the stories that come before the Parable of the Good Samaritan help you better understand the parable?

3. Based on how today's devotion described discipleship, how well are you living as a disciple of Jesus? What needs to change for you to follow Him on the journey to the cross?

4. Think about some of the people you know who are marginalized, folk on the outside looking in. What do you specifically need to do to encounter them the way Jesus encountered people, demonstrating love and compassion, but always pointing them to the Kingdom?

**Take time to pray for one another. Pray that over the course of the next 11 weeks (and hopefully beyond) that each of you will learn how to be a true follower of Jesus.**

# WEEK Two




Read out loud the Parable of the Good Samaritan as found in Luke 10:25-37. When we read something out loud, it often helps us find points of emphasis that simply reading silently fails to emphasize. For this week, let me encourage you to read it aloud from the New International Version (NIV).

"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
— Luke 10:25

In asking the question, the teacher of the law seeks two things. First, he's trying to trap Jesus. As members of the Pharisees, they had legitimate concern that Jesus was throwing their religious system into question. This was an attempt to find out where Jesus stood on some important issues, to pigeonhole him. This expert in the law wants to make sure Jesus' teachings match what his group believes and practices. This is not the first time that a teacher of the law has tested Jesus, nor will it be the last.

Most of us have found ourselves at one time or another doing this. We never really think of it as testing Jesus. Rather, we simply want to know that Jesus is on our side, that he approves of the things we believe and do. As such, we sometimes form Jesus into our own image, forcing our beliefs and actions on Him, rather than allowing Him to shape our beliefs and actions.

# WEEK Two

Second, this expert in the law was seeking validation that what he believed was right. He wanted to know for certain that what he had been doing was right and would lead to eternal life. Commentator William Barclay states that he believes this was a genuine question by this expert in the law. But even behind the sincerity, there is an ulterior motive—namely, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Again, for many of us, our tendency is to see the gospel only through an individualistic lens. What does it mean to me? How do I inherit eternal life? What must I do? Instead, we have to understand that Scripture was intended originally to be read in community. For the early church, they would hear this read in a community setting, one where they would then engage in a discussion on what it meant. In fact, one could argue that spiritual growth happens best in community as we engage one another, learn from one another, and live life together.



# WEEK Two

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. Can you think of a time when you've ever tried to make sure Jesus was on your side? What was the issue you were dealing with that you wanted to make sure Jesus approved of?

2. Do you ever find yourself wondering whether what you're doing will lead you to eternal life? How can we know for certain what will give us eternal life?

3. What did you think when you read that Scripture was originally intended to be read in community? What difference does reading it together with others make?

4. If someone were to ask you, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" how would you respond?

**Take time to pray for one another. Pray that each of you will come to understand and live out what it means.**

# WEEK Three

This week, read through Luke 10:25-37 again, this time from the NRSV. We will use different versions as we go along to keep the story fresh and to see how different versions emphasize certain elements of the story through their interpretation of Scripture.

Last week we talked about the Lawyer who came to Jesus. This week we want to explore the question Jesus asks in return.

> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"
> — Luke 10:26

The question the expert in the law asked Jesus may have been intended as a trap, but it follows naturally on the discussion Jesus was having with his followers. In the previous chapters, Jesus has been discussing with them that faithfulness to God is hearing and doing God's Word. Thus the question raised by this man continues the conversation and takes it to a new level.

The question raised by the lawyer is one that the listeners would have recognized as a common theological question. And as such, the legal expert, probably having heard Jesus talk about how to treat one's enemies at an earlier time (Luke 6), now seeks to further that conversation. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus responds to the question without hesitation. But notice that he doesn't simply answer the question. As was typical of rabbinical teaching, Jesus answers the question with a question of his own. "What is written in the law?"

# WEEK Three

This was not an abstract question Jesus was asking. Jewish men often wore a small box, called a phylactery, on either their foreheads or arms. These boxes contained small pieces of paper on which certain passages from the Torah were written. These included the following: Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11, 13-20; and Leviticus 19:18.

So when Jesus says, “What is written in the law?” he’s in effect saying, “Look at the phylactery on your wrist and tell me what is written therein.” Of course, as a good Jew, the lawyer would have these verses memorized. By age 12 all Jewish boys would have memorized the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). For those fortunate to be chosen by a Rabbi to continue learning, by age 16 they would have memorized the rest of the Old Testament! So this lawyer definitely knew what the law said.

However, Jesus asks the question because he wanted the lawyer (and us) to realize that the pathway to eternal life wasn’t something new, but actually something very old. It was following the very commandments God had already given to the people, namely that we are called to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength, AND to love our neighbor.

One of the lessons we can take from this story is that in order to follow after God, to be Jesus’ disciple, we must know God’s Word. As we saw above, a Jewish child of twelve would have memorized the Torah. And yet, for most of us, we gripe about having to read a few verses as part of our daily quiet time with God. I think our problem is that we don’t really believe that God speaks to us through God’s Word. We tend to look at it simply as history, and believe we can glean some meaningful information from it if we try hard enough.

# WEEK Three

Let me encourage you to see Scripture as God revealing the Holy Spirit's heart to you. It is God's ways of letting us into the Creator's Story, of finding our place therein, and ultimately discovering, as this teacher of the law did, that in order to follow after Jesus, we must know God's Word.



*picture credit: Kevin Carden*

# WEEK Three

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. How would your reading habits change if you truly believed that Scripture was “God-breathed” and “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16)?

2. What difference does it make when you understand that reading Scripture is the primary way we have of knowing who Jesus is and thus what it means to follow Him?

3. James 2:8 reads, “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.” On a scale of 1-10 (1 being awful and 10 being great) how would you rate yourself on living out this royal law of Scripture? What needs to change for you to improve in this area?

4. Work with one another to talk about various bible reading plans that can help you become better acquainted with what Scripture actually says. You can find a helpful resource for how to better read Scripture, along with a daily reading plan to cover all of the Bible in one year, through this QR code:

**Use your prayer time today to pray specifically for the project you are working on together. Pray for the people involved, those who will be impacted by the ministry, and for God’s grace to be evident in all you do.**

# WEEK Four

As you prepare to read the Parable today, take a few moments to center and quiet yourself. Ask God to help you see the story anew, with fresh eyes, in order to capture the heart of what God has in store for you.

Again, read the Parable (Luke 10:25-37) out loud. Choose a version you haven't previously utilized. If you don't have multiple versions available on your bookshelf, consider downloading the Bible app for free. You'll have access then to dozens of Bible versions.

> "He answered, '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.'
> "' You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this, and you will live.'"
> — Luke 10: 27-28

In his response, the expert in the law replies with a part of the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:5 ("Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"), the portion of the Law that a faithful Jew was expected to recite daily. This particular section of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) calls on the nation of Israel to worship and love God entirely. This would have been a normal response from any Jewish person in answer to the question Jesus asked.



# WEEK Four

But notice that, in addition to quoting from the Shema, he also quoted from Leviticus 19:18 ("Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord"). Following the tradition of some rabbis (and we would say, the tradition of all of Scripture), this teacher recognized that these two commandments are joined together. To follow one is to necessarily follow the other. And to break one is to necessarily break the other. And as we'll see, while he didn't necessarily have the right understanding of "neighbor," he at least recognized that to love God meant one also had to love one's "neighbor."

I can only imagine that Jesus is extremely pleased, as his response is short and to the point: "Correct answer. Now practice what you preach, and you will experience life as it was meant to be lived."

If someone asked you, "Do you love God?" your immediate answer would be "Of course I do." But if God asked you, "Do you really love your neighbor in the same way you love me?" how would you respond? Could you truthfully say "Yes"?

It's one thing for us to say we love God. It's another thing entirely to put that into practice by showing how we love our neighbors. We don't get to pick and choose how, when, and where we will love God. Jesus asks us to love the Lord totally—heart, soul, mind, and strength. Similarly, the command to love our neighbor also comes with the same idea—we are to love them as we love ourselves. In other words, there is never an "off" time. We love continually, everywhere, and everyone. To do any less, according to 1 John 3:10, is to demonstrate that we really don't love God. "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister."

# WEEK Four

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. This expert in the law recognized the importance of linking these two commandments. What do we need to do to also recognize their importance in our lives?

2. Why is it so hard to love certain people? How does God's love compel us (2 Corinthians 5:14) to love them?

3. List the names of 3-4 people or people groups that you have a hard time loving. It could be a classmate, a co-worker, a terrorist group, a political party, etc. Spend some time praying for these people by name, asking God to instill in you Jesus' love for them.

4. List at least four specific ways that you can tangibly express love to someone you have a hard time loving. Commit to engaging in at least two of these over the next few weeks.

**As you pray together, share the names you wrote about in question three. Pray for each other that God will help you see them as the Lord sees them, and that you'll learn to love them the way Jesus loves them.**

# WEEK Five

Working through the Parable the way we are doing it can sometimes cause us to lose sight of the larger picture.

Let me encourage you to read through the entire Scripture passage (Luke 10:25-37) again, as you read it aloud from a different version of the Bible than you normally use. This will ensure we see how the various parts we're discussing fit into the larger story Jesus tells.

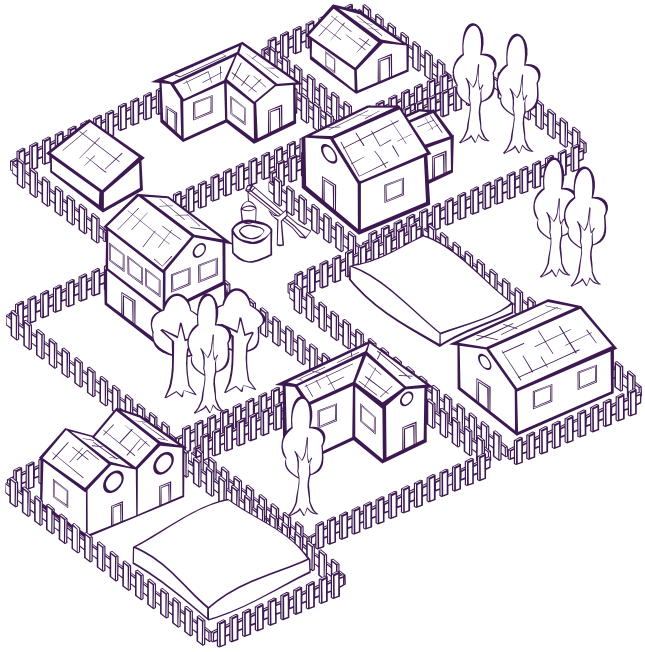
"But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
— Luke 10:29

We have to understand that different groups of people had different opinions on the question of "Who is my neighbor?" This lawyer more than likely was in the camp of the Pharisees. While the Old Testament talked about neighbor more inclusively, a narrower interpretation of "neighbor" arose, one that the Pharisees espoused.

The Pharisees believed strongly that they needed to separate themselves from contamination, which they believed non-observant Jews transmitted.

This separation applied to fellow Israelites. How much more would the Jews have shunned the hated Samaritans, a group that the Jewish religious authorities particularly despised because they believed the Samaritans practiced a perverted version of the Jewish faith.

# WEEK Five



Historically, all cultures have tended to draw boundaries, differentiating themselves from "the other." We know that Greeks, for instance, tended to see everyone who did not speak Greek as a barbarian. Similarly, Jews tended to see the world as comprised of two groups: those who were faithful and devout Jews, and everyone else (who were considered Gentiles).

In asking the question, "Who is my neighbor?" this expert in the law is adopting the traditional way of defining "neighbor" as those who are like me—my group, my nation, my family, my friends. In asking this question, the lawyer isn't really asking whom he must love, but rather, who can he avoid loving because they're different than us.

The lawyer is hoping that Jesus will affirm this definition of neighbor. After all, it is the one he, a religious leader, has followed all his life. Surely, it must be the correct interpretation. If Jesus affirms it, the man can walk away content, knowing that he has done the right thing to inherit eternal life.

As we said earlier, all civilizations have drawn boundaries, indicating who is in (who is like us) and who is out (who is different from us). However, in the Gospel of Luke, as we will discover over the next few weeks, Jesus doesn't just push boundaries; he destroys them.

# WEEK Five

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. Write down the names of everyone you know who lives on your block.

2. Discuss why you do or do not know all the people on your respective blocks. Does this say anything (positive or negative) about you? Should it say anything about you? Why?

3. Ask each other, “What would it take to learn all our neighbor’s names? Are we willing to try?”

4. Brainstorm ideas on how to meet your neighbors. Brainstorm even more ideas on how to love your neighbors. As you close, pray with each other, asking God to help you be aware of opportunities to meet and love your neighbors, and to have the courage to do so.

**As you close, pray with each other, asking God to help you be aware of opportunities to meet and love your neighbors, and to have the courage to do so.**

# WEEK Six

Read the story aloud again by reading from The Message version. If you don't have it, you can find it on the "Bible" app for your phone or at www.biblegateway.com.

"Jesus answered by telling a story. " —Luke 10: 30

I don't know about you, but when I ask a question, I like to have a direct answer. After all, when I ask the question, it's because I want an answer. I want some facts that I can use to figure out the answer to my question.

Have you ever noticed that so often when Jesus responds to a question in Scripture, he responds with a story (a parable) to answer the question? Ever wonder why that's the case?

When someone gives me a direct answer to my question, I now know the answer. But the reality is, I am really accepting the other person's response as being true, without determining for myself whether it is true. Too often, that means I uncritically accept it as a truth.

However, when we hear a story or parable, we aren't given a black-and-white answer. Instead, we are told to find ourselves in the parable and determine what our role and response should be. We are given the opportunity to think more deeply about the story, trying to discern what truth is there for us to learn. And we have the opportunity to learn more than one thing, as we can discover multiple answers to our question.

# WEEK Six

Rabbis understood this, and almost always answered a question with a question to promote learning. They wanted the students who followed them to be good thinkers, people who weren't content to simply accept others' responses as truth, but desired to learn the truth for themselves.

A good Rabbi believed that one must tell a story in a way that it becomes alive in the telling, and the listener must conjure up a living picture and visualize him or herself in the action.

Perhaps the most important aspect of telling a story is that it can take an abstract theological issue (e.g. "Who is my neighbor?") and turn it into a real-to-life story. Jesus had a wonderful ability to do this. In the case of this teacher of the law to whom Jesus is talking, it probably wouldn't have been enough to tell him, "Everyone is your neighbor, even those Samaritans that you hate so much. So go love them the same way you love your Jewish neighbors."

He could have ignored that, not believing Jesus had authority for his life. He could have chosen to see Jesus as part of another sect, and thus Jesus' words weren't really applicable. Or he could have chosen to simply discredit Jesus as going against the other Rabbis.

# WEEK Six

But by telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus forces the teacher of the law (and us) to wrestle with just who my neighbor is. I'm sure the teacher of the law wasn't expecting this. And truthfully, neither are we, if we're honest with ourselves. We come to Scripture expecting black-and-white answers to all our questions. But Scripture doesn't always work that way. More often than not, Scripture invites us to enter into the Story, to find our role and to observe what is going on. And then most importantly, Scripture invites us to examine our life to determine whether we are indeed fulfilling the role Jesus invites us to take.

As you try to share with others about who your neighbor is, it can be too easy to default into talking about theory. And when that happens, people tend to tune out. However, if you can share with them a story, especially a true one (and even better if it has happened to you, then the theory becomes reality and brings the idea much closer to home. This idea of "Who is my neighbor?" moves from my head to my heart, which then allows me to think about how I should respond. The Gospel story is never content with just giving us more information, but always calls us to action. The only question is, will we respond?



# WEEK Six

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. What difference will it make if you can see yourself in the story/parable?

2. As you think again about the question, “Who is my neighbor?” find yourself in the story. Which character do you most gravitate to and why?

3. In John 8:47, Jesus says, “Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God.“ And in Luke 11:28, Jesus makes it clear that listening is never enough when he writes, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” Talk with each other about where you find yourself more often—simply listening to the words, or obeying them? Why?

4. Knowing what Scripture says to do is one thing. Being willing to follow through and do it is another. What keeps us from moving from knowledge to action?

5. How can you ensure that when you read Scripture, you’re willing to place yourself in God’s Story (which means God’s will is what you follow) rather than trying to place God’s Story into your life (and you deciding what you’ll do)?

**As you close, pray with each other, asking God to help you be aware of opportunities to meet and love your neighbors, and to have the courage to do so.**

# WEEK Seven



Read aloud Luke 10:25-37.

“There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way, he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half-dead.”

The area between Jerusalem and Jericho is about 17 miles long and steep, dropping over 3600 feet.

It is loaded with lots of narrow, rocky defiles, as well as lots of sharp turns, all places along the way where robbers, who were common along this path, would hide and attack people who were traveling solo. The road is often called “The Red or Bloody Way” because of the amount of bloodshed on it.

The robbers would attack, taking everything the victim owned, including the very clothes off their back. Unlike us today, many people in this time did not have a closet full of clothes to pick from. In fact, many of them simply had one primary tunic and one outer coat that kept them from both the rain and the sun; clothes were valuable.

However, the Scripture says they “took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead.” In other words, they treated him like a corpse on a battlefield, scavenging all he had, including the very clothes he wore. He would have appeared, from a distance, as dead.

Have you ever encountered someone who had gone through an incredibly difficult time, practically losing everything they had in the process?

# WEEK Seven

I have some good friends who are missionaries in Bulgaria. Over the last year, they have been at the forefront of encountering the refugees streaming from the Syrian war. Time after time, they have encountered people who, like the Jewish traveler in the story, basically lost everything because someone chose to take advantage of them on their journey. My friends shared this story recently:

"'We were robbed yesterday. They took all of our money. 3,000 euros, our phones, anything valuable.' -Iraqi woman nursing her baby today.

We are seeing another spike in refugee numbers and another dynamic change in the situation on the Balkan highway. The number of people in Serbia is growing significantly again. But with this increase comes a new wave of reality. Almost everybody had a story of being robbed, beaten, jailed, forcibly controlled along the journey. What was once a long and exhausting journey has now become a very dangerous journey.

The [Iraqi] woman..., Al-aa. She has 2 children named Ibrahim (4) and a 1-year-old daughter.... She is pregnant. She is traveling with her husband. Last night she was hospitalized for exhaustion and dehydration in Belgrade. Yesterday, she and her children and husband were robbed as they walked to Serbia from Greece.

They had paid 11,000 euros to smugglers to get them from Baghdad to Germany. The 3,000 that they carried with them was for the expenses on the way. Unimportant things like food, diapers, water.

There are hundreds of refugees on the grass in the Belgrade park. Almost everyone has a story of trauma - first in their country of origin but also now as they transit here through Europe."

# WEEK Seven

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. As we saw last week, Scripture often asks us to place ourselves in the story, taking on the role of the various characters. In this case, imagine what it would be like to be the one beaten, robbed, and left for dead. What would it be like to be the family (with the pregnant mother) who was robbed of all they had and found themselves basically left for dead?

2. It's too easy to see the current refugee situation in the world as too big for us to do anything about. Yet, as we learned during YBL, it all comes down to just making a difference in the life of one person. Who in your community might be that one person who most needs your help? What can you do to help them?

3. In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Jew is the one who is robbed, beaten and left to die. What difference does it make when we see refugees as people who are hurting through no fault of their own?

**Close in prayer, asking God to help you have the eyes to see those who are most hurting in your church and community, and committing to being used by God to be used in their lives.**

# WEEK Eight

Read through Luke 10:25-37 again from The Message version. When you get to verses 30-32, read slowly, thinking carefully about what they are really saying.

"Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man."
— Luke 10:30-32

It's easy for us to read this account and feel the need to judge the priest and the Levite in this story. I mean, who chooses to simply walk by a person in extreme need and do absolutely nothing? But before we get too "high and mighty," maybe it would help us to understand the culture of this time and the position of these men.

Some have suggested that these two religious figures were concerned with being defiled (and then labeled "unclean") if they were to touch a corpse. For those who belonged to the group called Pharisees, they took this to the next level, believing that they would become unclean if even their shadow touched the dead person! Granted, the Levitical Laws were clear in this regard. If a priest touched a dead body, they would be unclean. And if a person were "unclean," they could not then perform their religious duties.

The problem with this perspective, however, is that Scripture says that both men were going from Jerusalem to Judea. In other words, since the Temple would have been in Jerusalem, these two men were going away from it, thus implying that they were done with their Temple duties for a specific period of time. Furthermore, even a priest had a duty to bury a neglected corpse.

# WEEK Eight

This begs the question then—why didn't they stop?

Let me suggest that the primary reason has to do with the culture in which they lived. You may recall that when the 12 Tribes of Israel were formed, one tribe was called the "Levite" tribe, and this tribe had a specific duty to serve in the Temple. This duty applied to those who were of the Levite tribe. In other words, only those from this tribe could serve in this way. It's what we term "ascription"—namely that they weren't chosen to be priests, but assumed the role simply because they were born into priestly families who were part of the tribe.

Because of their birth, they were held in high regard. They were viewed as extremely pious due to their roles and positions, someone who could clearly see the difference between right and wrong, clean and unclean. They were accustomed to being evaluated on the basis of their Tribal affiliation and birth, not on their actual performance. As such, others would not only have heard their actions in the story Jesus told as being in line with their role, but many would have even applauded them for their consistency.

Truth be told, we can sometimes be like the Priest and the Levite in the story. "What!" you say. "No way would I choose to ignore someone who was near death!" While we all believe that, consider how often we become focused on the things we need to do and fail to recognize the needs of the people around us. We set priorities, strategic goals, and endeavor to bring those to completion. Needy people tend to derail us from accomplishing these things. Or we say, "Well, I need to have boundaries in my life. I can't just allow others to usurp all my time."

# WEEK Eight



Jesus, as he often does, reminds us that even when we're doing good, religious things, that is never an excuse to ignore the needs of those around us. Granted, it is easy for us to feel overwhelmed, believing the need is just too great for us to do anything. But Jesus, in another parable, tells the story of the good shepherd who leaves 99 sheep out in the field in order to go look for the one that was lost (Luke 15). Therefore, while we may not be able to fix everything, we can fix some things. This is a tension for every leader. Inevitably, the multiplied needs of people will overwhelm any person's capacity to respond to them all. But the answer is not to refuse to get personally involved at all. While you may not be able to care personally for everyone, sealing yourself off from them is never the answer.

# WEEK Eight

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. Pastor Andy Stanley says every leader who wants to model what it means to care, must "do for a few what you wish you could do for all." What does this mean to you? More importantly, how do you do this?

2. Have you ever become so focused on doing things that you missed an obvious need in front of you? If so, tell that story, and how you think you got to that point.

3. What needs to change for you to actually make a difference in the lives of the people around you?

4. Perhaps you've heard the famous Serenity Prayer that reads as follows:
"God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference."
How would praying this prayer on a daily basis help you discover what needs you can respond to?

**Close in prayer, asking for God's discernment to help you recognize the needs you can address, and to be willing to trust that God is at work in the lives of the others.**

# WEEK Nine

"A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back.'"

— Luke 10 33-35

The type of story that Jesus tells would have been well known to his hearers...at least up until a certain point. The story pattern normally would have gone like this: priest, Levite, and an average pious Jew. These type of parables were commonly used to make the case that even when the religious leaders of the day may fail in their duties, one could always hold out hope that a fellow Jew would respond to the need in a priestly manner. So imagine the surprise, even shock, of the listeners when Jesus tells them that the third person in the story is not a pious Jew but rather a hated Samaritan!

Why exactly did the Jews and Samaritans not get along? To understand this, we have to go back and look at their shared history. In 722 B.C.E. the Jewish nation was conquered by Assyria, and the best and brightest of the Jews were shipped away. Those who were left in the land ended up marrying the other races in the area. This in turn resulted in them not only adopting non-Jewish customs, but non-Jewish religious traditions. Thus they became a mixed race that took the name Samaritans. As such, when the Jews finally returned from Assyria, they now viewed these Samaritans as not fully Jews, and therefore they were ceremonially unclean, a social outcast, and most importantly, religiously a heretic.

# WEEK Nine

So when Jesus tells his story and makes the Samaritan the hero, the people would have been aghast. “How could those we despise, those who are different from us, those we consider as being less than, be the hero of the story?” they would have thought.

And that’s exactly the point Jesus is making. The Samaritan is the hero of the story not because of his nationality, but because of his actions. Most of the time when we refer to this parable, we call it the story of the Good Samaritan. However, notice that the word “good” never appears in the story. Rather, over time, we have come to recognize that the Samaritan is indeed “good” because of his actions. And that’s what Jesus wanted his Jewish listeners to understand.

What separated the Samaritan from the priest and the Levite was that he decided he couldn’t stand by and do nothing. He had to act. He chose to enter into a situation where potential harm could happen to him, and which ultimately cost him a great deal financially. Yet he was less concerned with his own health or wealth, and more concerned with responding to the other's need.

The simple reality is that there are needs all around us. The question is how will we respond? While the needs of the world may be overwhelming, the truth is that there are needs around us that we can do something about if we simply have the eyes to see and the willingness to act. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi (1566-1607) once said, “If I am in contemplation [meditation] God is helping me; if I assist my neighbor I am helping God.” We need to find ways to both encounter God through our personal devotions, while also seeking ways to encounter the other. Jesus invites each of us to respond as the Samaritan did—without regard for how others might view us, but simply out of deep concern and empathy for our neighbor.

# WEEK Nine

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. What are the needs in your community? How can you best respond to them?

2. What are you willing to give up in order to meet the needs of others? Is there a limit to what we are willing to give up to help others?

3. What group of people do you tend to view as the Jews viewed the Samaritans? What would it take for you to move beyond your current viewpoint and learn to see them as people made in God's image just as you are?

4. What will need to change in your life to move you from just focusing on yourself, to instead responding to the needs of others as an act of worship of God?

**Close in prayer, asking God for the courage to be willing to respond to the needs around you without fear of how others might judge.**

# WEEK Ten

"What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"
"The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded.
— Luke 10:36-37



"Which of the three became a neighbor?"

This is a crucial question we have to answer because it affects how we respond.

One of the things we have to recognize is that for many of us our "neighbor" is only those with whom we associate. They're the people who are most like us, those who share our interests, and people that we like. Like the religious scholar, we tend to want to justify ourselves before God by saying, "But God, I am a good neighbor! I show love to those around me, and I give of my time to others. Isn't that enough?"

If we've learned anything from the ten weeks of studying this parable so far, it would be that Jesus always calls us to go beyond what we think is acceptable and instead see what He thinks is acceptable. In the case of the religious scholar, he had a prejudice against the Samaritan because the Samaritan was different. Notice that the religious scholar can't even bring himself to name the man. He can only address him as "the one who treated him kindly." Even when confronted by Jesus, he still struggles with the idea of now considering Samaritans as his neighbor.

# WEEK Ten

The problem we have to recognize is that prejudice precludes the possibility that an attitude will change even once indisputable evidence is presented. There are not enough facts or enough evidence available to change a hardened heart. Repentance is necessary. That is a fact.

Once we've repented, we then have to begin to see our neighbor through different eyes. No longer do we see them as a problem to be fixed. Rather, as Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, "The most significant thing in life that can happen to our neighbor is his being taken seriously as a person." Learning to truly hear our neighbor and his or her concerns, learning to see things from their perspective, understanding their context and situation—all of these are critical to our really being able to see them not as "the one who treated him kindly" (in other words, seeing them as an object), but as a person with a name, an identity, one who has dreams and hopes. When we begin to see others the way Jesus does, we will in turn respond accordingly.

As we discussed in last week's devotion, we have a responsibility to meet the needs of others. However, while responding to individual needs is an important (and I might add, Christian) thing to do, there also comes a time when we stop just trying to bandage the wounds of those who have been harmed. Instead, we begin to ask, "What are the systems in place that continue to allow such harms to regularly happen?" In other words, we are seeking to get at the reasons that the hurts, the injustices of this world occur. We seek to uncover why systematic racism still exists. And when we ask this question, we understand that systems are at work that contribute to these things happening. We begin to recognize that sometimes the very systems we depend on (economic, political, etc.) are the same systems that contribute to these ongoing issues.

# WEEK Ten

It’s never enough to just ask the “what” question, though. Instead, seek to find the answer to the “how” question—“How can we fix this?” This requires us to dismantle those systems that hurt people and focus on building and affirming more justly oriented systems.

How is this done? By first recognizing that these are complex issues and there are no simple solutions. But what we can do is find ways to bring attention to the injustices we find, then seek solutions for the individuals we encounter. Addressing these systemic issues will require all of us working together. We'll find our way as we move forward together, but we must move forward.

For the sake of the soul of our society, for the sake of each and every family and person, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to these issues. As Martin Luther King once stated, “You don't need to see the top of the staircase to take the first step.”

So, wherever you are, whatever you do, however you feel called to live out God’s call on your life as you best understand it, please seek to be people of and for life for all.

# WEEK Ten

**As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:**

1. Take some time to seriously reflect on how you see others. Do you believe that you have any issues with racism or with simply seeing others as less than yourself? If so, what can you do to allow God to address these issues in your life?

2. Think about some folk you know who are in need. What needs to happen for you to take them (and their issues) seriously?

3. As you look at your community, what do you see as some of the larger systematic issues that tend to create injustices? What can you do to better understand these issues and find ways to help those impacted by them?

4. Who can you begin to partner with in an attempt to do something about the larger injustices at work?

**Close in prayer, asking God to give you insight into the systems at work that keep people down and cause injustice. Then pay for the courage to address them.**

# WEEK Eleven

"Jesus said, "Go and do the same." — Luke 10: 37b

This encounter between Jesus and the religious scholar does not end satisfactorily for me. In fact, it's left open-ended. He has heard the word from Jesus. He knows what is required of him. The question is, will he do it? Or like the rich young ruler(Mark 10:17-22), will he end up going away sad?

In the case of the religious scholar, he obviously knew the right answer, based on his previous statements about the two greatest commandments, and his response to Jesus' question. However, Jesus isn't content for the religious scholar to simply know the right answer. If he wants to be Jesus' disciple, the religious scholar needs to respond by doing. "Go and do likewise," Jesus says. This seems to me to be the ultimate thrust of this parable—namely, that in order for compassion to be real, it must always result in action.

Earlier in the book of Luke, Jesus tells us that "those who hear God's word and put it into practice" (Luke 8:21) are the ones who are members of his family. We don't get to pick and choose what we will do. If God tells us to do it, we must do it if we want to be Jesus' disciples.

Of course, it's important for us to always remember that we can only "do" what needs done when we rely on Jesus' power. We can only respond in love when we have first encountered that love, as we seek daily to grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus. When we do this, we in turn receive the love of God. Therefore, any ministry that we do should become nothing more than an outgrowth of who God is and what God does.

# WEEK Eleven

This means that the ministry we have entered into is not our own ministry, but the ministry of Jesus Christ. Most of us tend to think, at least initially, that it is our ministry, and Jesus is there to help us.

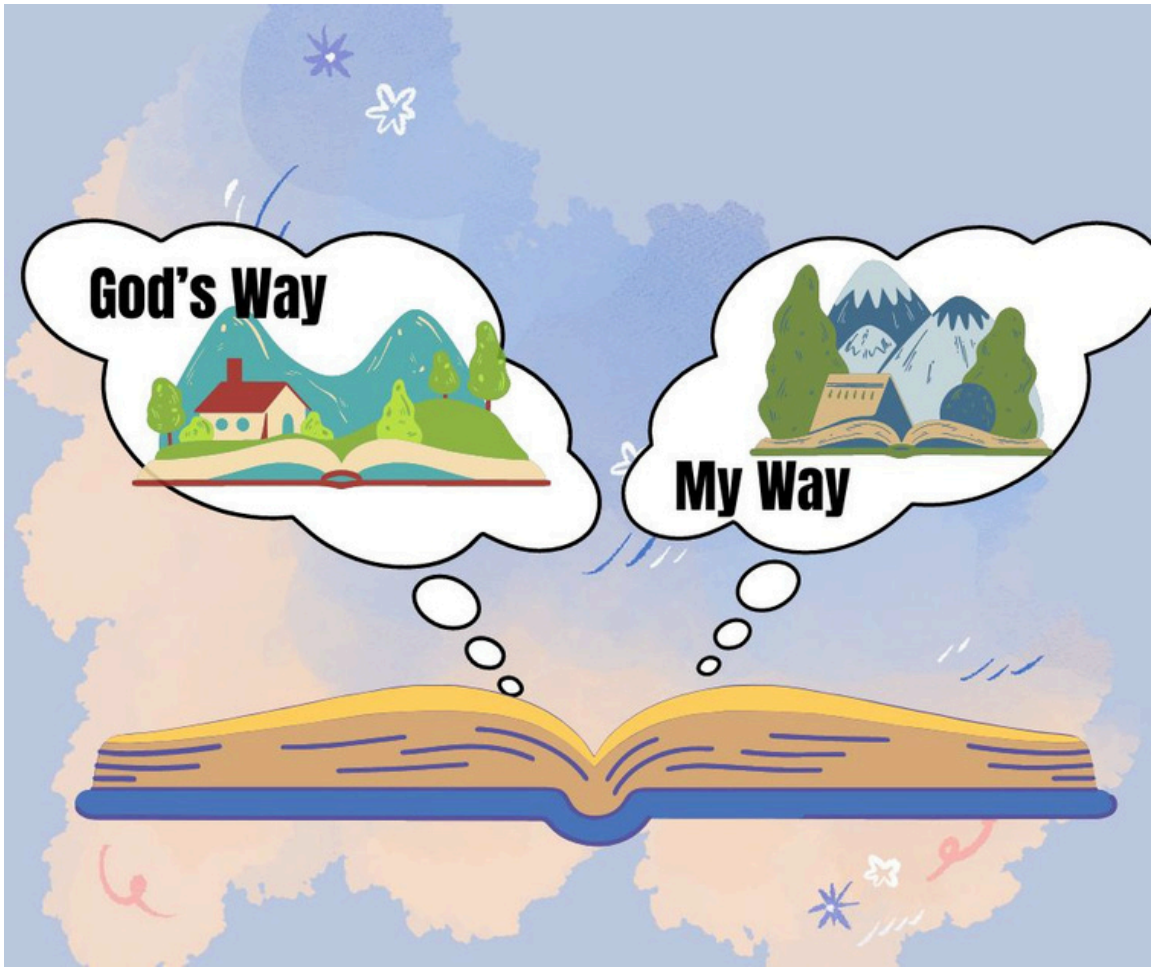
What we do in Christian ministry is not just ask Jesus to help us be good ministers and to be like him, but we actually join him! We tend to think of Jesus' ministry as a three year stint and then he went back to the Father. But that is a wrong understanding. The resurrection of Jesus was the beginning of his ministry as he continues to do it through us. No longer is it localized through Jesus' physical body, but as He works through the body of Christ.

Therefore, when we talk about Christian ministry, we have to understand that it is not us asking Christ to join in our individual ministry as I offer Jesus' love to others, but rather it is us joining with Jesus in His ongoing ministry as He offers himself to others through us!

The difference may seem subtle, but let me suggest it is actually quite profound. Ministry then is figuring out what Jesus is already doing and piggy-backing on it. He invites you and I to participate with Him in ministry. The good news is he wants us to go along for the ride. What an amazing thing! Our Savior, Jesus Christ, paves the way for us as we engage in ministry together with Him.

# WEEK Eleven

As you think about doing ministry in your local community, it's important to remember that Jesus is already at work there long before you arrived on the scene. When we remember this, it allows us to see what Jesus is doing and join with Him, rather than trying to forge our own way ahead. Furthermore, it gives us confidence that we are not doing this alone, but working with Jesus. After all, it's not what we are doing that ultimately matters, but what God does through us that matters.



# WEEK Eleven

**As you prepare to meet this week, answer the following questions:**

1. The term “orthodoxy” means right belief. The term “orthopraxy” means right practice or behavior. Our tendency as Christians is to focus only on right belief, and not allow that belief to also impact our actions. When you examine your life, do your beliefs about God always result in action for God? Why or why not?

2. How would you define ministry?

3. When you think about ministry (even the project you’re doing for YBL), do you find that you see what you’re doing as your ministry or as Jesus’ ministry? What difference does it make?

4. What do you need to do to ensure that you’re engaging in Jesus’ ministry rather than your own?

**Close in prayer, asking for wisdom to determine where Jesus is already at work, and then commit to joining God in that ministry.**

# WEEK Twelve

Read the whole parable (Luke 10:25-37) once again slowly. Try to put yourself in the position of each of the characters, but especially consider yourself in the role of the religious scholar.

As we've learned over the last eleven weeks, the parable of the Good Samaritan has a lot to teach us. As we conclude our twelve weeks of devotions, let's look at one last area from which we can grow as we continue to seek God's heart for us.

Notice that while the religious scholar wanted to know who his neighbor was, Jesus turns the question around to ask, "Who acted neighborly?" In other words, Jesus says the focus isn't on who is my neighbor (that is, trying to assess who is worthy of being my neighbor). Instead, it is a move to be a certain type of person, one who acts simply to be a neighbor when we encounter need. That said, being neighborly does not mean we can or should even try to meet every single need. That is an impossibility. But it does mean that we recognize that when we do our small part, we are one piece of a much larger puzzle that collectively makes a huge difference. As Darrell Bock reminds us, "sometimes being a neighbor means just being there when a painful situation emerges with a neighbor. Neighborliness comes in all shapes and sizes. It is limited only by our failure to see, feel, and respond" (Luke, NIV Application Commentary, p. 303).

This changes our approach to preparation for ministry. You may have heard the old saying, "Preach as if everything depended on God, but prepare as if everything depended on you." I want to suggest that is a flawed understanding of ministry. Instead, we should "Preach as if everything depended on God, and prepare as if everything depended on God."

# WEEK Twelve

Note that this doesn't alleviate our responsibility to give of our best effort in ministry; rather, it means that even in our preparation, we are totally leaning on God to guide us and give us strength. "Jesus, you have a sermon you want to preach to a group of people, so give me the words I need to say. You have a plan to do ministry here, so give me the wisdom to know how to enact that plan."

When we acknowledge that it is Jesus' ministry, it relieves us of the burden that often comes with ministry. In other words, because this is Jesus' ministry, I know that He loves and cares for the people I am ministering to more than I do or ever can. A lot of burnout in professional ministry results from not understanding this.



"Modern Day Good Samaritan and Merton's Epiphany," 36 x 48 inches, Acrylic and Oil Pastel on Canvas, by Susan E. Brooks, currently on display as part of "Art in City Hall," Louisville, KY.

# WEEK Twelve

**As you prepare to meet this week answer the following questions.**

1. What difference does it make when we choose to be “neighborly” instead of asking “Who is my neighbor?”

2. All of us have a vocational call to love God and love others. What difference does it make if we choose to love God first and then allow God’s love to flow through us to others?

3. As was stated, it’s far too easy to become fatigued by all the ministry needs around us. What will you need to do to keep this from happening to you?

4. As we wrap up these 12 weeks of devotions, share with each other what 2 or 3 principles have most impacted you during this study of the parable of the Good Samaritan and why.

**Close in prayer, asking God to help you embrace the Holy Spirit’s heart for the world, and learn to rely solely on Jesus to do the ministry our Creator invites you to join in.**