

Background for Facilitator:

This is one of Jesus's most known parables, so much so, that every state has "Good Samaritan laws" that legally protects someone not of the medical profession who provides assistance in an emergency to an injured or ill person.¹ For people of faith, this passage flips our expectations: the people we expect to help the victim by nature of their identity do not help. The person who has the most reason to not help the victim is the one who ultimately goes above and beyond to help.

We can only create the Kin(g)dom of Heaven on Earth if we act in ways aligned with the God-mind: universal love for all, which includes people we don't like or know. It is the greatest challenge of our lives, but a necessary journey for all of us.

You might need to define some terms for your participants. There will be time to do so after the Scripture reading:

- **Priest:** a religious leader for the Jewish people who made offerings on behalf of the Jewish people at the Temple
- **Levite:** a Jew, descended from the Tribe of Levi, who served in the Temple alongside priests singing, protecting the Temple, and opening and closing the gates
- **Samaritan:** a person from Samaria. Samaritans are descended from the Israelites, but unlike other Jews, they were not forcibly relocated from the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the Assyrian exile. Samaritans and Jews did not get along because of their differences: largely because the Samaritans intermarried with Gentiles (non-Jews) and some worshipped other gods. The most distinct difference is the Samaritan's belief that Mount Gerizim is the most sacred mountain, rather than the Temple Mount (Mount Moriah) in Jerusalem.
- **Denarii:** the money of Jesus's day. Two denarii would have been equal to a day's wages.
- **Mercy:** showing compassion and forgiveness

Please adapt this lesson as you see fit to meet the needs of your group, space, and time frame. And please add any of your own knowledge or stories to the lesson when you teach it in your context.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles/access to the Scripture
 - Plenty of notecards/slips of blank paper/sticky notes
 - Pens, pencils, and/or markers
 - 1 Paper bag for each participant
 - Optional: white board/easel paper, and their appropriate writing implements
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Opening Prayer:

Dear God, please be with us during this time as we learn about the Good Samaritan and loving our neighbor. Help us to understand your message of care for all of humankind. Bless our time with friendship and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK542176/>

Opening Activity: Who is My Neighbor?

As a group, ask participants “who do you consider to be your neighbor?” Feel free to write their answers down on a board or easel paper. If the group is thinking narrowly about the definition of neighbor, encourage them to think beyond people they know or who live near them. Remind them that God considers all of humanity to be one large family, as we are all Children of God. Affirm answers as they are shared.

Transition with: For Jesus, everyone is our neighbor, even if they don't live near us, or look like us, or act like us. Even if we don't like them, or they don't like us, they are our neighbor! In a moment, we will read Jesus's answer to someone asking how to get into Heaven. Jesus's answer might surprise you.

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

Author suggestion: if you have enough youth/participants, assign each person a role in the scripture to read and act/mime out (safely, of course!)

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷ 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.’”

²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Discussion Questions:

Transition with: Being a good neighbor, loving others, and helping people when they are in need, is very important to our church. God asks us to love everyone the way that God loves us: with no strings attached. Sometimes this is not easy or convenient. Let's think more deeply about what we just read:

- First, was anything unclear about what we just read?
 - This would be a good time to define the terms in the *Background for Facilitator* section
- Who were you expecting to help the victim? Why?

- What do you think the Samaritan was thinking or feeling as he helped the victim?
- When have you been like the Samaritan – helping someone you did not know? When have you been like the Priest or the Levite? The victim?
- How can we practice showing love to others?

Teaching:

Jesus is asking us to do something difficult: even if we don't like someone, we are called to love them. And this is really hard! Jesus knew that, which is why practicing to love others is a life-long journey. To love one another means treating people with kindness, respect, and open-mindedness. Anyone in need is our neighbor. We can't truly love God if we ignore the people around us.

Love is a verb – it is doing something to show people compassion, help, and forgiveness. The Priest and the Levite failed to do what needed to be done, which was help a person in immediate need. However, the Samaritan, who was the least expected person to help, took a chance and acted on compassion when he saw the victim needing help.

Jesus commands us to show mercy and love to others the way the Samaritan did. In fact, this the most important lesson Jesus taught us and wants us to follow!

Application Activity: Encouragement Bag

- Pass out the paper bags to each participant, along with the notecards/slips of paper and writing implements.
- Ask the participants to write messages of love and encouragement on each paper.
 - "You are awesome"
 - "You are loved"
 - "I believe in you"
 - "Keep up the good work"
 - "You are appreciated"
 - "Be kind to yourself"
 - "Be yourself"
- Invite them to decorate the notes as well
- When each card is completed, have them place it in their bags
- Tell the participants to pass out these notes to anyone they want: other people at the church, the cashier at the store, family members, friends, or anyone who could use an encouraging message. After all, everyone is their neighbor!

Author tip: if there is time, invite the participants to decorate their bags

Optional Activity: Pop Quiz

This is a very easy pop quiz. Tell your participants that you will shout out various people, and they need to answer one question for each person: is this person my neighbor? The activity is rhetorical in nature: the answer will be "yes" for every person shouted out. Some suggestions for people to shout out include:

- Your family
- The leaders of your church
- LGBTQIA people
- Firefighters
- People who live on other continents
- Babies
- Teachers
- People who live in your town

- Elders/Senior citizens
- People who live across the country
- People who don't speak English
- Homeless/unhoused people
- Penguins
- The people shopping at the grocery store

Closing Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for this time together, and for teaching us what it means to love our neighbor. Like the Good Samaritan, encourage us to help anyone in need, even when it is hard or inconvenient. Give us the strength to be like Jesus. Bless our notes of encouragement so they remind people they are loved. We lift up all of our neighbors in the world for your holy care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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