

Don't Pass By on the Other Side

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Jesus was once asked by a lawyer what was the greatest command. To this lawyer, Jesus responded, “...*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself*” (Luke 10:27).

The lawyers or rabbis of Jesus' day were known to argue about the meaning of the Scriptures. The question raised by this lawyer was of first importance. Isn't it interesting how Jesus gave such a brief answer to such a profound question? Love was the foundation of the old law. Love has always been the foundation of having a relationship with God. God is love; therefore we are to love.

While Jesus' answer was brief, the lawyer recognized the far-reaching implications of His response. So, as lawyers are known to do, this lawyer asked a follow-up question: “*who is my neighbor?*” (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered further with a parable:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise (Luke 10:30-37).

When reading this exchange, we are not surprised a lawyer asked for a term to be defined. Asking Jesus a question was acceptable; however, this lawyer was not prepared for Jesus' answer. Perhaps we have approached Jesus in a similar fashion.

The lawyer was looking for a preconceived answer. Remember, the lawyer initiated this conversation in an attempt to justify something he had done (Luke 10:29). He was not prepared to receive the answer Jesus gave him. If we have a question for Jesus, we must be open to receive His answer. Otherwise, our search will be unprofitable.

At the conclusion of this parable, the lawyer learned two important truths of the kingdom. First, our neighbor is not defined by proximity, ethnicity, or social standing. Our neighbor is our fellow man. Second, rather than focusing on defining our neighbor, we must develop the practice of being neighborly. This is proven by showing mercy to our fellow man.

Of course, this conversation was not just some religious debate. What Jesus taught this lawyer was ultimately proven by Jesus when He went to the cross. Jesus showed mercy to everyone when He died for the world. Learning about Jesus self-giving love is designed to compel us to give of ourselves to the service of God and neighbor.

Yet, loving our neighbor as our self can be difficult and challenging. There are times when we might ignore our neighbor. Even worse, sometimes we may hurt our neighbor. Jesus' parable in response to the self-righteous lawyer made clear how we are to love our neighbor as our self without exception or excuse.

In the parable, a priest and Levite had an opportunity to stop and help a man in distress. For whatever reasons, both passed by the man on the other side of the road. Only the despised Samaritan stopped and helped the distressed man. When Jesus asked the lawyer which of the three men was neighborly to the man in distress, the answer was glaringly obvious to the lawyer: *"the one who showed mercy."* Jesus commanded the lawyer to, *"Go and do likewise."*

The parable of the Good Samaritan is well-known. As well-known as the parable is, the moral and ethical principle of loving our neighbor as our self is not frequently practiced. We are often too consumed with ourselves to be concerned with the well-being of others. Like the priest and Levite, it seems too easy to pass by on the other side when confronted with a situation requiring our help.

Have we ever wondered by the priest and Levite passed by on the other side of the road instead of helping the beaten man? Perhaps the priest and Levite were in a hurry to get to their destination. Perhaps they did not have time to stop and help the man in distress. Maybe the priest and Levite assumed someone else would come along and help. Someone else did come and help, but in the meantime, the man in distress continued to suffer. Of course, this point is not to endlessly speculate about the parable. The point is to consider why we might pass by on the other side of the road.

When presented with a situation requiring your help, have you ever passed by on the other side? We all probably have at one time or another. Why is it so easy to pass by on the other side?

Is it because we think we have more important things to do? Helping and assisting someone is less important than whatever it is we are going to do? Is passing by on the other side

easy because we do not want to be inconvenienced? The Samaritan did not just stop and help. He delayed his travel plans and made adjustments in his schedule. Or, is passing by on the other side easy because we assume someone else will not be far behind to help? When presented with an opportunity and an ability to help, the Samaritan took responsibility for the man in distress. Responsible Christians do not assume someone else will help.

As Christians, we are not to pass by on the other side when someone needs help. When someone is in need, sick, brokenhearted, struggling in sin, Christians are to stop what they are doing and show mercy to their neighbor.

Jesus taught we are to go the second mile to help someone: *“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away”* (Matt. 5:41-42). This is exactly what the Samaritan did. In Judgment, Jesus taught those who will be saved are those who took the time to help those who were in need (Matt. 25:34-40). By helping the least among us, we serve Christ.

Conclusion

If someone needs help, don't pass by on the other side. If someone has fallen on hard times, don't pass by on the other side. If someone needs to be encouraged, don't pass by on the other side. If someone needs restored to faithfulness, don't pass by on the other side. If someone needs the Gospel, don't pass by on the other side. Instead, show mercy.