

## The Good Samaritan and Good Deeds

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### Introduction:

Whenever Jesus says, “Do this, and you will live,” our ears should perk up a bit. We are about to hear something important. In fact, we are about to hear something upon which our very souls depend. This is exactly what Jesus said in **Luke 10:28** while talking to a lawyer who asked, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (**Luke 10:25**, ESV). This drives it home even further. We should be sitting at the edge of our seats wanting to know what is this formula for going to heaven. When we examine this story, we find out that part of this heaven bound formula is good deeds. Let’s examine what happens in response to this important question we are all asking.

### Discussion:

- I. Who is my neighbor?
  - A. All too often, we read this parable and forget that it was actually an answer to a question. A lawyer had asked Jesus in **Luke 10:25**, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (ESV). Jesus turned the question back upon the lawyer to get his ideas first. The lawyer said he thought he needed to love God and love his neighbor. Jesus told the lawyer he was right. This response made it look like the lawyer had asked a pointless question because he already knew the answer. So he sought to justify himself by asking another one. “Who is my neighbor?”
  - B. Are we asking this question today? We know we are to do good deeds. We know we are to love our neighbors. Who, however, is our neighbor? Who do we actually have to love? For whom do we actually have to do good deeds? What kind of limitations might we put on this? This question is really not surprising coming from a lawyer, likely one of the Pharisees. It has a very legalistic ring to it. It is as if to say, “I certainly want to love my neighbor, just like the law says, but to be able to do that I need to know exactly which people are my neighbors.” These lawyers and Pharisees were the kind of people who developed very specific rules like exactly how far someone could walk on a Sabbath day, which they claimed was 2000 cubits. They were able to come up with loopholes to their own rules, like on Friday a person could take a possession and set it 2000 cubits from their actual home and claim it was an extension of their home. They could then walk to the home satellite because they wouldn’t be walking more than 2000 cubits. But they would then be back at home and could walk another 2000 cubits. The kind of answer this man is expecting is very exact. For instance, “Everyone within one mile of your home is a neighbor. Love them.”
  - C. There is a sad implication to this question. It is as if the lawyer was saying, “Prove to me who is my neighbor, because I don’t want to have to love anyone more than God absolutely requires.” He was looking for limitations. He wanted to know exactly how far he had to go in this love thing to be good enough. How might some limit their love today? Some might limit it to family. Some might limit it to those who live in the neighborhood. Some might limit it to other Christians. Sadly, with the lawyers and Pharisees, I could almost see how they might have dealt with it if Jesus had said, “You must love everyone within one mile of your home.” Some of them would have figured out how to make the place they lived be something other than their home and therefore, they didn’t actually have to love the folks around them.
  - D. The story Jesus tells is actually quite surprising. First, this is the story of people who are traveling. They aren’t near their homes. How can we be talking about neighbors if we are on the road far from home? From the very beginning we understand that Jesus doesn’t view someone as a neighbor based on how close they live to our home. Then keep in mind that Jesus is responding to a lawyer, who would have been among the Pharisees. As Jesus tells His story, I can almost see the smug smile on the lawyer’s face as Jesus mentions a priest and a Levite who clearly didn’t keep the law by loving their neighbor. The lawyer would have been smug because the priests and Levites were commonly of the Sadducees. Of course they would be bad guys who didn’t really love their neighbors. I can again almost see his crestfallen face as he surely expected the hero of the story to be a lawyer or Pharisee like himself. They are always so concerned about the law they would be the one to love their neighbor like they were supposed to. But the hero is not a Pharisee; he is a Samaritan. How on earth could that happen? The Samaritans are dogs. They are religious mongrels who can’t keep straight who they worship, let

alone how to serve Him properly. How this lawyer must have cringed as the weight of this story fell down on him. I can't help but notice that when Jesus asked the lawyer to explain which one proved to be a neighbor to the man among the robbers, he didn't say, "The Samaritan." It is almost like he cannot bring himself to say it. He knows the answer, but he just can't get it out. So, he just says, "The one who showed him mercy."

- E. But what is the answer to the question based on this story? We are to love every person with whom we come in contact, no matter where we are, no matter who it is, no matter what they have done to us, no matter what they could do for us. Look around you. The people you see are your neighbors right now. When you get to the restaurant for lunch, the waitress is your neighbor. When you go to Wal-Mart, the check out clerk is your neighbor. When you get home, the guy walking down the street is your neighbor. When you walk downtown, the homeless guy with the cardboard sign is your neighbor. When you are driving down the road, the woman pulled over with the flat tire is your neighbor. When you are on the job, your boss, your co-workers as well as the customer who just walked in is your neighbor.
- F. Finally, notice that Jesus didn't get the lawyer to admit that the half dead man was the neighbor who needed a good deed. He got the lawyer to admit that the Samaritan was the neighbor. This means that even if that waitress has done a bad job, if the check out clerk was a jerk, if the guy walking down your street is an atheist, if the homeless guy has been a poor steward, if the woman on the side of the road has a bumper sticker for the other political party, if the boss, co-worker or customer just cussed you, they are still your neighbor. Your job is to do good to them no matter how they have treated you.

## II. Love in action or the anatomy of a good deed

- A. *Good deeds spring from mercy.* In **Luke 10:37**, the lawyer saw what the Samaritan had done. He had bestowed mercy on the nearly dead man. We often think of mercy only in the terms of "forgiveness." Mercy is much more than that. Mercy is the act of relieving the afflicted. Mercy is much more than feeling sorry for someone. Mercy means taking the steps to help them. I'm sure the Levite and the priest felt sorry for the robbed and dying man. But they did not have mercy. Understand this; it is certainly a good deed for us to have friends over for a meal. But the greater good deed is in feeding those who are without because we are relieving their affliction (**Luke 14:12-14**). Never forget what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:7**, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (ESV). We often hear folks say that God helps those who help themselves. Actually, this points out God helps those who help others.
- B. *Good deeds often involve risk.* Notice I said "often." Maybe we could say "always," but I don't want to overstate the case. Certainly in **Luke 10:33-35**, the Samaritan took a risk. First, it was a risk for him to stop and see to the robbed man. It could have been a trap. Even if it wasn't, the mere fact that the guy was laying there demonstrated attackers could be near just waiting to pounce on someone else. But he stopped anyway. He took another risk when he got to the inn. He told the innkeeper he would pay for anything the innkeeper had to spend when he got back. The innkeeper or the robbed man might take advantage of his mercy. Yet the Samaritan did the good deed anyway. Many of our good deeds will put us at risk. As we extend our hand of mercy and compassion, others may bite our hands. We almost always make ourselves vulnerable to be taken advantage of when we start offering out good deeds. Just remember this, no one ever went to hell for being taken advantage of.
- C. *Good deeds are always a sacrifice.* I'm very willing to say good deeds are "always" a sacrifice. If nothing more, performing a good deed means sacrificing time that could have been used in a personal pursuit. I think about the priest and Levite and I understand their desire to get on by. I don't know how many times I've passed a stranded driver because I was in a hurry to get somewhere or get something done and I was able to drive 70 miles an hour. Notice the sacrifice of this Samaritan. He sacrificed time. Who knows how much farther down the road he could have gotten, but instead he had to stop at the next inn and he spent the night there before continuing his journey. He sacrificed his place on the animal and walked. He sacrificed his oil and wine. What would he use if he got hurt? He sacrificed two denarii (and possibly more). That's two day's wages for the common laborer.

- D. *Good deeds are done even when they are not deserved.* Did this robbed man deserve the care the Samaritan gave for him? Had this man ever done anything for the Samaritan? I can think of another possible reason the Levite and priest passed by. Surely God wouldn't allow something bad like this to happen to one of his faithful children. He must be in this situation because of his own doing. Therefore, this must be what he deserves. How often do we see people in financial distress and instead of helping we point out they are only reaping what they deserve. It is their own stupidity that got them here. Don't get me wrong; I'm not in favor of enabling behaviors. Clearly, if a man won't work, don't let him eat (cf. **II Thessalonians 3:10**). But at the same time, good deeds are done even when they are not deserved. Think about where we would be if God treated us the way we treat others. What if God waited until we deserved it to forgive our sins? What if God said, "Look, it's your own stupid fault you have all these sins. Don't ask me to help with them"? Remember that this whole story came about because of God's law to love our neighbors as ourselves (**Luke 10:27**). We can't help but remember **Matthew 7:12** and the principle we often call the golden rule. We are supposed to treat others the way we want to be treated, not the way they deserve to be treated, not the way they have treated us, not the way they would treat us.
- E. *Good deeds are done without expectation of reward.* When the Samaritan passed by the nearly dead man, there were no passers-by. He would not receive any accolades from those who witnessed his good deeds. Further, there was absolutely no indication that this man would ever be able to repay him for his sacrifices. But the Samaritan did the good deed anyway. Certainly, sometimes we may receive a reward from men when we do good deeds. However, we must not do them in an attempt to receive a reward from man. Rather, our goal is to glorify God. If we are seeking any personal glory or reward, then the reward we receive is all we will ever get (**Matthew 6:1**).

### **Conclusion:**

As I've already stated, the part of this story that is often overlooked is the question that started it all in **Luke 10:25**. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (ESV). The answer was love God and love your neighbor. Jesus said, "Do this, and you will live" (**Luke 10:28**, ESV). This story was merely to let us know who is supposed to be the object of our love. We must not miss, however, the import of this question. This means if we do not love the "Samaritans" with whom we come in contact, we will not live. In the greater context, this story makes a startling point. The Samaritan would have eternal life while the priest and the Levite would not. These men who were likely traveling down the road because they had just completed or were on their way to work at the temple had not loved their neighbor and would not live. All the "official religion" they performed did not help them at all because they did not love their neighbor. Please notice what this means for us. We can "go to church" every time the doors are open. We can go only to a congregation that practices and teaches the absolute truth. We can take the Lord's Supper every Sunday and only on Sunday. We can worship God and edify one another through singing without instruments. We can rightly point out the local congregation is not an institution for material welfare. But if we do not love our neighbors and render mercy to the afflicted, we will not live. At the same time, there is the startling point that the hero was a Samaritan and not a lawyer or a Pharisee. He was not a person who was totally absorbed with trying to draw every possible line. He was a person who had compassion and loved others. Certainly, it is important to get God's law right, that is part of loving God. But, brothers and sisters, if we stay huddled in our congregations trying to hash out all the ins and outs of Christ's doctrine and do not allow Christ's mercy and love to shine through us toward our neighbor both spiritually and materially, our correct doctrine will not save us. Being Zealous for Good Deeds is not a neat thing to add to our spiritual repertoire if we feel like it. Without good deeds toward our neighbor, everything else we do is empty and worthless. Let's love God. And let's love our neighbors, wherever we meet them and then we'll inherit eternal life.