

## “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”

Luke 10:25-37

### INTRODUCTION

1. Many of you know I have two daughters. My wife and I tried to provide equally for their needs as they grew up. I cannot imagine one of my daughters going hungry, without medical care and without adequate shelter and clothing for most of her life - while the other had all of her needs met.

Yet, that's the experience of about half the children in the world today. And that's why God says so much to us about the importance of compassion.

2. But if you're like me, I often feel like the man who told his wife about an elderly woman he passed on the side of the road. She was desperately trying to change a flat tire in the pouring rain.

He said, *“I couldn't believe how many people drove right on by.”* Then he said, *“I would have stopped myself if I hadn't been on my way to work. After all I couldn't be late.”*

3. Frankly, there's not a lot of room in our world for compassion. One old cynic said recently, *“Don't bother telling people your troubles. Half of them don't care and the other half figures you probably had it coming to you.”*

Folks, that attitude is prevalent everywhere we turn. That's one of the reasons why **real compassion is so compelling**. And it's one of the reasons God has so much to say about it in the Bible.

Eg. Henry Ward Beecher said,

*“Compassion will cure more sins than condemnation.”*

I think he was right. Because that's true, Jesus told a story that's the focus of our attention today. It's found in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, please turn there with me.

In this story, a poor Jewish man happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Bandits attacked him and left him half dead along the side of the road. They even took his clothes. As you heard in the story, a priest saw the beaten man and walked right on by. So did a Levite. It was only the Samaritan who stopped to help.

One author suggested that this story reminds us there are three kinds of people in this world. . .there are...

- those who beat up others, like the robbers. They basically say, *“What's yours is mine and I'll take it.”*
- There are those who pass up others, like the priest and the Levite.

They say, *“What's mine is mine and I'll keep it.”*

- And there are those who help up others, like the Good Samaritan.

They say, *“What's mine is yours and I'll share it.”*

The lawyer asked Jesus, *“Who is my neighbor?”* so he could rule out some people he didn't have to help. Jesus tells the story to emphasize that we should help anyone we're in a position to help. In other words, my neighbor is anyone in need that I'm able to help.

God has much to say about the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. In fact, did you know there are more than 560 verses from Genesis to Revelation that deal with the responsibility of God's people to help those who are poor and oppressed?!

Look at these words from Proverbs:

*"Whoever is kind to the needy honors God"* (Proverbs 14:31).

Proverbs 21 says:

*"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered."* (Proverbs 21:13)

And the prophet Isaiah said:

*"If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday"* (Isaiah 58:10).

In other words, God has a heart for those who are in need, and He wants us to develop a heart just like His. Proverbs says it like this:

*"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy"* (Proverbs 31:8-9).

John Stott, the great Bible scholar, said it like this:

*"The perspective of Scripture is not the survival of the fittest, but the protection of the weakest."*

So, if I'm going to develop a heart of compassion in a heartless world, what lessons do I need to learn from this story? I want you to see four insights from this story that will help me develop a heart of compassion in a world where that's so desperately needed. First of all, I must...

## 1. SEE THE NEED

Did you notice verse 33?

*"A Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him..."* (Luke 10:33).

Would you agree that it's easy to look right past those who are in front of us and have needs? If you don't think that's true, watch how easy it is to look right past someone who's homeless or someone who looks like he hasn't had a bath for a week, or even somebody who is in a wheelchair.

All of us are busy, and because we're busy, we develop blinders to those who are hurting or lonely.

The Bible tells us that:

*"When Jesus saw the crowds coming, He had compassion on them..."* (Matthew 9:36a).

If anybody had a big job, it was Jesus! He was the Savior of the world! Yet, He did not allow His schedule to keep Him from compassion.

I love what Hebrews 13 says:

*"Remember to welcome strangers, because some who have done this have welcomed angels without knowing it"* (Hebrews 13:2-NCV).

I wonder how many angels I might have missed because I was just too busy. If I'm going to develop a heart of compassion, I have to be willing to see the need of those who are broken around me. John writes these words:

*"If people say, 'I love God,' but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen" (1 John 4:20-NCV).*

In other words, if I have really experienced the compassion of God in my life, I will have a heart of compassion for others. If I've really begun to understand how merciful God is toward me despite the sin in my life, I'll show mercy to others.

Paul wrote these words to Titus:

*"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit..." (Titus 3:4,5).*

Do you understand that...

- Compassion is connected to the health of my relationship with Jesus?

When my own heart has been touched by the compassion God has shown me, compassion will just ooze out of my life.

Yet, for many of us, we're just too busy to see the need. One poet wrote these words,

*"I was hungry and you formed a humanities club to discuss my hunger. I was imprisoned and you went to your chapel to pray for my release.*

*I was naked and you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health.*

*I was homeless and you delivered a sermon on the shelter of God's love. I was lonely and you left me alone to attend church.*

*You seem so close to God, but I am still very hungry and lonely and cold!"*

If I'm going to develop a heart of compassion, the first thing I have to do is, see the need. And then I must...

## 2. SENSE THE PAIN.

The Bible tells us in this story that when the Good Samaritan saw the wounded man,

*"...he took pity on him" (Luke 10:33b).*

Did you know that the word

- "*compassion*" just means "to be called alongside to help?"

It means to see the need and to sense the pain of others.

- You see, compassion is empathy, not just sympathy.

Genuine compassion means I sense the pain that someone else is experiencing.

Eg. Cardiologists tell us it's possible to have a silent heart attack. In other words, our heart muscles can be damaged so we're not even aware of the problem until a massive heart attack strikes later.

Do you realize it's possible to have a silent spiritual heart attack? It's possible that your heart might have closed to the needs of people around who are suffering, and you don't even know it.

Eg. If I tell you that 27,000 children under the age of 5 die every day, how does that impact you? If I tell you that 800 million people go to bed hungry every day, how does that make you feel?

The Samaritan could understand pain because there was pain in his own life. You see, the Jews hated all the Samaritans. And the man lying on the road was a Jew. There was no logical reason for the Samaritan to rearrange his schedule and spend his money to help his enemy. But compassion doesn't look for reasons to help. It looks for opportunities.

Eg. I've learned that those who show the most compassion are often those who have felt the most pain!

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians:

*“God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (II Cor. 1:4).*

Paul wrote to the Galatians:

*“Share each others' burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).*

Eg. An author named Allen Redpath wrote,

*“You can never lighten the load unless you have first felt the pressure in your own soul.”*

If I'm going to develop a heart of compassion, I have to see the need, sense the pain, and I must. . .

### 3. **STEP INTO ACTION.**

Look at vs. 34:

*“He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him” (Luke 10:34).*

Sometimes, we excuse our inaction by saying we just don't have the resources to help others. But did you notice what the Samaritan did? He took his own oil and wine and bandaged the man's wounds. He put the injured man on his own donkey and took him to an inn. In other words, he went the extra mile to show compassion! The Samaritan didn't wait for someone else to help; he took action.

Do you know what the Apostle John said about this?

*“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?. Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (I John 3:17,18).*

The longer I live, the more I realize it really doesn't take much to get started. Sometimes, all that's necessary is a hug, a not, a phone call or a cooked meal.

Eg. Some of you know we support an inner-city mission called, The Village Grace Mission Center, in Slavic

Village. It's a depressed area just outside Cleveland where there's a great need. I received an e-mail from Rich Bartley this week that read:

*"An unidentified male kicked in both of our steel doors and broke a few windows in the mission house. He kicked in the back door first. He broke the window of the food pantry before going to the side door and kicking it in. Tuesday morning after the police were done, we searched the house, but the only thing missing was some food. \$800 in damage and only a few food items were taken!*

*I took it very personally because we would have given the man food if he had come to us. I expect things to happen time to time, but it's still hard to accept especially since we don't budget for repairs.*

*"Unfortunately with the economy the way it is - people are getting to the point where they're doing desperate things. Compassion ministries are needed more than ever. Please help us make a difference."*

Some of you can step into action this week and help "Village Grace" make a difference in the lives of people in Slavic Village. You can indicate your interest on your Communication Card.

If I'm going to develop a heart of compassion, I have to see the need, sense the pain, step into action and...

#### 4. **SET UP A LONG-TERM PLAN.**

Look at these next verses in the story:

*"The next day he took out two silver coins 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.'*

*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise'" (Luke 10:35-37).*

Did you notice that the Samaritan was not the only guy involved here? He had a plan in place and he used that plan to involve others.

Eg. In the 1950's, the Korean War was raging. An American evangelist named, Everett Swanson, toured Japan and Korea. While he was there, he noticed dozens of children living on the streets, orphaned by the war.

He was so moved that, when he returned to the United States, he told the story of what he saw. From his efforts a ministry called, "Compassion International" was born that touches thousands of children around the world today.

Eg. About the same time, Bob Pierce was visiting the country of China. He saw much the same picture there. When he returned to the United States, he launched a similar effort for that nation and "World Vision" was born.

About 10 years ago, Pastor Dave Atkins made his first trip to Southeast Asia. He saw orphans in Cambodia who desperately needed the love of God. From his efforts, "Asia's Hope" was born that now sponsors over 500 children in Cambodia and Thailand... and our church now sponsors two orphan homes in those countries.

Eg. If I'm going to develop a long-term plan that grows from a heart of compassion, there are two questions I have to ask myself:

## #1 Am I available?

In the next several weeks, you have a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate compassion in our community through “Give A Christmas.” You can find brochures describing this ministry at the tables in the lobby.

The other question I have to ask myself is:

## #2 Am I flexible?

Eg. Have you seen this statement by Edward Everett Hale?

*“I’m only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.*

*What I can do, I should do. And what I should do by the grace of God, I will do.”*

## CONCLUSION

Eg. Do you realize that on November 8, 1923, the leaders of the tiny Nazi party met in a Munich tavern and elected Adolf Hitler as their leader? All that happened by a margin of just one vote. Imagine the disasters that could have been avoided if just one person had changed their vote.

My friend, one person can make a difference in the life of someone else.

- I may not be able to help everyone, but I can help someone!