

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

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" For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." (Galatians 5:14).

Prayer: Father in Heaven,
Help me to share this message that you have given me. Help us to understand better this story that Jesus told and to apply it in our lives. And may it be for your glory and your honor. Thank you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Someone once said that if you lend someone \$20 and you never see that person again, it was probably worth it. However, you might be thinking, "If I lend someone \$20, I probably will see that person again – because they'll be back for more, won't they?"

As Christians, we know that we should have a giving spirit, but just how giving should we be? Should we give to all those who ask? And if so, how much? What if we just don't like someone? What if we think someone is just trying to take advantage of us? We're going to talk about giving today and we'll answer these pertinent questions. We often have our suspicions when people are asking for money. We don't like to think that we are throwing our money away. I once lived in a place where it seemed like every other street corner had a beggar asking for money. I often wondered that if I gave them money, what would they do with it? Would they go from there and buy a pack of cigarettes or alcohol? Or was that really for me to judge? I know that we have a lot of differing opinions on this subject, so to bring us together; we must go to the Scriptures. Did Jesus have anything to say on this matter? This morning, we are going to see. Because as Adventists, we don't read our own meaning into the Scriptures, do we? No, we let the Bible speak for itself. We want to know what God wants, not what we want. I am not here today to tell you to give money to this organization or that or even to donate money to the Red Cliffs Church, although we could probably use it right now. Each person is different in his or her convictions about different organizations. But this morning, I'm talking more about giving to the poor and helping the needy and the suffering.

Let's turn now to one of the most famous stories in the entire Bible. We all know this story as **the Good Samaritan**. In my early days of learning math, my understanding always became clearer when I saw an example. Jesus often taught by using examples. I like that. The Good Samaritan is an example of how we ought to behave as Christians. By the way, this story is not a made up parable. It really happened. How do I know? Desire of Ages, p. 499 "This was no imaginary scene, but an actual occurrence, which was known to be exactly as represented." Not only that, the author says that when Jesus told the story, the very priest and the very Levite from the story were actually in the group that were listening to Christ's words. So hearing this story must have been hard

for them to take, don't you think? It must have hit right home. How would you feel if it had been you? A little ashamed maybe?

Luke 10:25And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27And he answering said, 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.

28And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

30And Jesus answering said, 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.

31And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34And 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.

35And 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.

36Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

The incident begins when a religious scholar of the Law tests Jesus by asking him what is necessary to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks the lawyer what the **Mosaic Law** says about it. The lawyer quotes the **scripture**, saying "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and all your mind (**Deuteronomy 6:5**), and the parallel law of "**Love your neighbor as yourself**" (**Leviticus 19:18**), There is no commandment more important than the commandment to love God (which is represented by the first four commandments of the Decalogue); there is no commandment so deserving of

second place as loving one's neighbor (which is represented by the last six commandments of the Decalogue). Jesus says that he has answered correctly— "Do this and you will live," he tells him. This can be understood as meaning that those who follow the law, whether they are Jewish or not, will be able to inherit [Eternal life](#). The lawyer knew the correct answer! And that is just our problem today – we think we know it all! We know about the Sabbath, the 2300 Days, the state of the dead, what to eat and what not to eat – we think we know it all! But do we apply it in our lives? What truly matters is the application of these principles in our lives.

The lawyer then asks Jesus to tell him who his neighbor is; [The lawyer wants to know the minimal requirement. "Who qualifies as 'neighbor'? How do I limit the field to fit this definition? Who is in? Who is out? Whom can I exclude and still satisfy the letter of the law and my own conscience? Should I regard the "unclean" as my neighbor?"](#)

[Jesus refused to be drawn into controversy. As we read in the Desire of Ages, "The way to dispel darkness is to admit light. The best way to deal with error is to present truth." When we reveal the love of God, it makes the deformity of sin and self-centeredness obvious.](#)

So Jesus responds with a parable about a man who was attacked and robbed and left to die by the side of a road.

There is a road that goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho. It is 17 miles long and drops about 3,000 feet in those 17 miles. It has long been a hazardous trip due to thieves and robbers. Jesus audience knew this road to be a dangerous one. [So the first thing anyone in his right mind might have assumed on encountering a body by the side of the Jericho road at dusk was, either this is a corpse, or it is a decoy planted by a gang of thieves. From this point of view, do the priest and Levite act without compassion, or just from a position of understandable prudence?](#)

So the man is lying there probably unconscious. He probably appears to be dead.

Later, a priest saw him and avoided him, presumably in order to maintain [ritual purity](#).

The priest had a good reason not to help. I mean, after all, he might really be dead. There's the possibility that the victim was already dead. And touching a

dead person for someone so 'holy', while not forbidden, would be such a hassle - all the necessary cleansing rituals prescribed by Mosaic Law. Priests were supposed to be ritually clean, exemplars of the law. There would be immediate shame and embarrassment suffered by them at the expense of the people and their peers for such defilement. Having just completed his mandatory two weeks of service, he would then need to return and stand at the Eastern Gate along with the rest of the unclean. Furthermore, in addition to the humiliation involved, the process of restoring ritual purity was time consuming and costly. It required finding, buying, and reducing a red heifer to ashes, and the ritual took a full week. The priest is in a predicament. Moreover, he cannot approach closer than four cubits to a dead man without being defiled, and he will have to overstep that boundary just to ascertain the condition of the wounded man.

And so the priest made a judgment call: he decided that being "priestly" was more important than saving someone's life. Jesus' unspoken challenge to all believers seems to be: would we help only if it's convenient, or are we willing to go out of our way to show compassion?

Similarly, a [Levite](#) saw the man and ignored him as well. Perhaps he thought, "If the priest may pass then so should I." Monkey see, monkey do. Do you do things just because you see others do them? I hope not. I hope you have a higher standard than that for making your decisions.

Then a [Samaritan](#) passed by, and the Bible tells us that Jews did not associate with Samaritans (Jn 4:9), but despite the hatred between Samaritans and the Jews, he immediately rendered assistance by giving him first aid and taking him to an inn to recover while promising to cover the expenses. The wounded man has no money. When it is time for the wounded man to leave, if he cannot pay the debt he can be arrested, Matthew 18:23-35. The Samaritan knows this and He gives the innkeeper two [denarii](#), [silver](#) coins equal to an entire days wages for an average laborer.

and whatever else is needed to see to the needs of this unidentified man. Additionally, the Samaritan had no way of

insuring the return of his money. Therefore, it is safe to assume he did not expect it to be returned.

That it was a priest and then a Levite who first passed by is significant beyond the irony of the situation: people who were expected to help, didn't, while someone whom the victim despised, did. The robbers hurt the man by violence, the Priest and Levite, by neglect. All three are guilty. *"To the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin,"* (James 4:17).

At the conclusion of the story, Jesus asks the lawyer who was the stricken man's neighbor? The Samaritans were so hated by the Jews **that the lawyer is apparently unwilling even to take the name, "The Samaritan," on his lips**, so he responds, "The one who helped him." Jesus responds with "Go and do the same." So a "neighbor" is anyone who needs your love and help. Jesus has turned the attention away from the question "To whom do I owe an obligation?" and has made it, "To whom do I feel compassion?" **Once I mentioned one of the Ten Commandments to someone and they said, "Oh, I keep the Spirit of the Law." But friends, it is impossible to keep the Spirit of the Law without also keeping the Letter of the Law. For example, how can I say that I love my fellow man and yet steal from him? It doesn't even make logical sense! In fact, if you study Christ's Sermon on the Mount, you will find that the Spirit of the Law goes one better. It implies truly having the feelings of love for your fellow man in your heart and not just going through the motions because you are obligated to.**

This parable is one of the most famous from the **New Testament** and its influence is such that to be called a Samaritan in **Western culture** today is to be described as a generous person who is ready to provide aid to people in distress without hesitation. In many English-speaking countries, a **Good Samaritan law** exists to protect from liability those who choose to aid people who are seriously ill or injured. The story of the Good Samaritan goes way beyond helping someone who is broken down on the side of the road. It involves helping others in every aspect of life.

Let's discuss the possible reasons why people did not help the stranger:

1. **This is a dangerous place.** If I help him, someone might rob me too! Have you ever found yourself saying that? I'm not stopping here! Too bad for him! What if Jesus had

said that about coming to this sin filled planet for you? Hmmm... With the measure ye mete, it shall be meted unto you.

2. **This might be a trick!** What if I get taken! Could the Samaritan have said that? Sure he could have, but he didn't. He was willing to take the risk. Judge not. This brings us back to the beggar that spends your gift on cigarettes and booze. "If I give something, they might go right down to a bar" falls into this same category. He is the one who must give an account to God for his use of it. But I believe you will STILL get a blessing because God knows your motive. Your motive was to help someone whom you believed had a need.

For those of you who watched Oprah yesterday, which was about scam artists, all the principles of the Good Samaritan still apply. There is nothing wrong with making an effort to protect yourself from scams. But don't let this stop you from being a loving and giving Christian. God is not asking us to be dumb. Now days you can call and ask for help and that way you don't get yourself into a dangerous position.

3. **This one is called the Judgment Response: "They have made their bed – let them sleep in it!" That is to say, "He probably deserves it!"**

Would you like to know what we all deserve? The wages of sin is death. But, praise the Lord, Jesus STILL came for us, didn't He?

4. **Someone else might help.** Yes, and someone else might NOT help. You know, you will be held accountable for the good that you ought to have done and didn't do. Let me say that again. You will be held accountable for the good that you ought to have done and didn't do.

5. **People are waiting for me; this could take hours!** Is it possible that your meeting is more important than the saving of a life or even just helping someone out of a bad situation? What is more important in the eyes of God? **In the Law of Moses, there is a law about not leaving the ox or donkey of your ENEMY to suffer, not just your neighbors ox or donkey, but your ENEMY'S. Ex 23:4** "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. **5** If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. **If oxen and donkeys are that important, what about people?** If your waiting party doesn't understand that, then perhaps you ought to hang out with somebody else. These words were heard over a radio station in Nashville, Tennessee several years ago: "The extremely strong emphasis upon others which we find in the scriptures grows out of a basic Christian concept. Every human being

on earth is infinitely important, because he was created in the image of God. He is, therefore, to be treated with respect and with love. "

We dare not mistreat him, nor ignore him, nor disregard his needs, for he is a Son of God.

6. **It might cost me something!** All of my finances are (selfishly) committed. Or: "See if the Need Fund has anything in it." It seems that as you age, you get more selfish. We should become more like Jesus.

We read in Desire of Ages how, as a child, Jesus would often skip His meal and take it out and give it to someone who was hungry. That's called sacrifice.

Jesus said, "Do not store up treasures on Earth where moth and rust destroy, but store up treasures in Heaven. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Yes, it might cost you something. Saving you cost Jesus something too, didn't it?

7. **Last time I had to help somebody, I had to get way too involved.** The Samaritan not only paid two days wages for the wounded man's care, but he also stayed a night with him. Many people forget that part of the story. Notice he didn't just pray for the man and go on his way either. No, he took the man by the hand and helped him. We should show by our actions what we really believe. Faith without works is dead. When people are far away, about all we can do at that moment is pray, but when people are close, we can also help them in a tangible way, can't we?

8. **What if it's someone I don't like?** Romans 12:20 Pr 25:22 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Jesus said, "Love your enemies.."

9. **I'll just pray for him. That's all I need to do. James 2:14** What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? **17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. **18** But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your ^{F6} works, and I will show you my faith by my ^{F7} works.

10. **"The poor you have with you always."** That is not to be used as an excuse. Because in the same sentence, Jesus said, "and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always." Mark 14:7

It reminds me of a man who went through an incredibly tough time and prayed to God for help. "Please God, let me win the lottery," He begged. Two days later, the man's car was repossessed. Again the man prayed. "Please God, let me win the lottery, they have taken my car."

A month later, after a whole month of prayer, the man lost his home. Again he prayed. "Please God let me win the lottery. My home is gone."

Suddenly a deep voice came out of the sky and spoke to the man. "Would you at least buy a lottery ticket?"

Now I'm not suggesting that you go out and buy a lottery ticket, but the point is that God wants us to cooperate with Him and show our faith by our works.

Do you find yourself saying, "I make sure I never encounter anybody who asks"? Jesus came to SEEK and save that which was lost. He's our example. We ought to do the same. We ought to look for those that need help.

Why can I afford to help everyone? Because I am the ambassador of Jesus and Jesus has all the resources.

Because one day, you will hear those precious words of Jesus, “When I was hungry, you fed me, when I was naked, you clothed me... If you do it to one of these...you do it even unto me.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

(Mt 25:34-40) ...inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **35** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: **36** Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. We have been blessed beyond measure, haven't we? Let's pass on the blessing.

See Jesus in that soul.

40 Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Who is my neighbor?

The man on the street that is asking for my help is my neighbor.

Who is my neighbor?

Someone from a different town, a different state, or even a different country that needs my help is my neighbor.

Who is my neighbor?

Everybody is my neighbor.

In the Jewish legendary material, again and again, when we hear stories of Sodom, it's not about sexual deviance, it's about peoples unwillingness to give charity to the poor and their wretched treatment of strangers.

Someone once said, “The greatest thing a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some on his other children.” “I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

We have been saved to serve. It is our mission in God's kingdom to help others. Let's love our neighbor as ourselves.

In Jesus Sermon on the Mount, we read MT 5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said; Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; **45** That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. **46** For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? **47** And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Mt 5:43-47

In the absence of sin, we have an empty shell.

And we must replace it with good works.

Righteousness is not what you don't do, but what you do do.

When you look around you in the world today, do you see any signs of selfishness? You even see it in the way people drive down the road, cutting each other off, don't you? As we read in the Desire of Ages, "Many who profess His name have lost sight of the fact that Christians are to represent Christ. Unless there is practical self-sacrifice for the good of others, in the family circle, in the neighborhood, in the church, and wherever we may be, then whatever our profession, we are not Christians." (Desire of Ages p.504.)

Did you know that God "permits us to come in contact with suffering and calamity in order to call us out of our selfishness?" COL 388

Jesus was at work until dawn and into the day after helping others. COL 383 The whole focus of His life was upon helping others. The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister...Mt 20:28

You remember Jesus stood up in front of the synagogue and read these words from Isaiah: (Lk 4:18) The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, **19** To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (**Lk 4:18-19**, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

And in Luke 6:30 Jesus said these words: "Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

Give to them that ask. Did Jesus really say that? Yes, Jesus really did say that. No conditions. **Wow!** It doesn't get much plainer than that, does it? He did not say you had to make them millionaires, but He did say to GIVE when you are ASKED. And just in case you are thinking about asking me for money today at the door just to make a point, you know your motive and so does God. You must give an account to God for everything you do. He knows what everyone needs. The point of helping somebody is not to make him or her rich, but to alleviate a need. We should give according to need.

About a year ago, a young man from Nairobi, Kenya sent out an email to several American churches including Adventist churches asking in desperation for a little money to help out his situation. One Adventist church voted not to help him for two reasons. 1) It could be a hoax, and 2) The Need Fund was for members only. However, one church member decided to help him out. Because of some other situations that arose, the church member helped him out a few more times. In the process, the young man was becoming interested in the Adventist Church. Soon he began attending a Seventh-day Adventist Church, and later he was able to bring his whole family to church. Just recently, he got baptized. But what would have happened if no one would have helped him? Or what would have happened if he had been helped by perhaps a member of another denomination?

Lets read on:

Luke 6:31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

The discussion began with a question: what must I **do** to inherit eternal life. The conclusion is answered with what must be done. Jesus said of the Samaritan, "Go and do thou likewise."

Priest – represents the law which cannot rescue anyone

Levite – represents rites & ceremonies which cannot rescue anyone

Samaritan – represents Jesus, outsider, hated, rejected, but felt compassion. His priority became me. Because I'm there, dying, lost,..

The Innkeeper represents us as Christians waiting for Jesus return. He's our Good Samaritan. He saved us. When we were lost, we were represented by the victim, beaten by the enemy, half dead spiritually. But now we are Ambassadors for Christ. Jesus said, "Abide till I come." Take care of the poor, the helpless, the needy. And when I come, I'll reimburse you. My reward will be with me.

We are all on the road to Jericho. And Jesus was like the Samaritan. He was willing to touch the unclean. He was willing to go to the lost, the outcast, and the needy. We should be like Jesus. Although like the Samaritan, Jesus was an outcast in the eyes of the Lawyers, Priests, Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

And like the Samaritan, He gives you and me hope. He carries you and me to a place where all are welcome.

“I have paid the price.” He says, “I’ll be coming back again. I’ll make up everything.”

And notice the victim in the story didn’t say, “Oh you, a Samaritan, going to help me? No, I’d rather just die here by the side of the road. This is too humiliating for me. I can’t take it.”

When you study the history of the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans, you begin to realize that this story breaks down all kinds of social and racial barriers. We are all children of God.

You know, we can learn a lot from a box of crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull. Some have weird names, and all have different colors, but they all have to live in the same box. The story of the Good Samaritan makes racism and classism impossible.

And I hope you’re not too proud to receive help from the meek and lowly Jesus of Nazareth as you walk along the dusty road of life, because He is the real Good Samaritan.

He gave all for you and me. Freely you have received, freely give. Then YOU will receive, in good measure, pressed down, and running over.

CLOSING SONG: Give Of Your Best To The Master Hymn #572

Prayer: Father in Heaven,

Help us to be more like the Good Samaritan. Help us to be more giving; to be more like Jesus who was willing to take the time to help us when we were lost and dying.

Make us ambassadors of Christ to a world that desperately needs our help.

In Jesus name, Amen.