

Am I A Loving Neighbor? (Luke 10:25-37)

1. The inquiry and intention of the teacher of the Law (v.25-29)

- While Luke does not inform us of the timing nor know the level of access the general population had as Jesus taught the seventy-two and twelve (v.17-24), Luke includes this to demonstrate matters concerning discipleship and the kingdom of God.

The Guest (v.25):

- The “lawyer” who enters the scene would have been a distinguished teacher, perhaps a scribe or Pharisee. Regardless of his official status, he would have achieved a “teaching status,” which indicates that he is an expert on the Mosaic law.
- He stands up (v.25). Disciples honor a teacher or lawyer by “standing up” since rabbis typically sit down to teach. However, the lawyer wants to “test” Jesus. His words betray his posture.

Dialogue #1: The lawyer → Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v.25)

- He asks Jesus what he “can do.” In Greek, this is an active participle, which indicates that he desires to know “the thing” he must do to earn eternal life. Included in the same question is “to inherit eternal life.” Either eternal life is earned by good work(s) or a gift. Can you earn it, or is it a gift? Which one? It cannot be both!

Eternal Life: Eternity is placed in the heart of every image-bearer (Ecc. 3:11). Eternal life, however, can be used as a synonym for being “saved” or entering God’s kingdom (18:18). The OT speaks of eternal life, or an eternal inheritance that would be tied to eternal possessions in the land (Ps. 37:29; Dan. 12:2).

Dialogue #2: Jesus → the lawyer, “What is written in the Law?” (v.26)

- Jesus does not answer his question but instead points the supposed “expert” back to Scripture. He did this to assess the competency of the lawyer.

Dialogue #3: the lawyer → Jesus, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” (v.27)

- The lawyer essentially cites the Shema (Lev. 18:19; Deut. 6:4-9) in completion: vertically (toward God) and horizontally (toward others).
- It is the four-fold response of loving God with your heart (emotions), soul (consciousness or vitality), mind (understanding and disposition), and strength (motivation and drive). It aims to assess the quality and totality of one’s love, demonstrated in love toward one’s neighbor.
- While Jesus will speak of it throughout His earthly ministry (Matt. 22:37-40; Mk. 12:30-31), only a few in Israel are recorded as verbalizing the essence of the law.

Dialogue #4: Jesus → the lawyer, “You have answered correctly; Do this and live.” (v.28)

- The lawyer has answered his own question correctly and is now forced to come to terms with whether he can gain eternal life based on the essence of the law.
- Jesus meets the lawyer where he is and kindly tells the man to practice what he has just assented to being true.

Dialogue #5: the teacher of the law → Jesus “And who is my neighbor?” (v.26)

- Luke informs us not only of the audacity of the lawyer to test Jesus’ theology (v.25) but also that he wants to “justify” himself.
- The lawyer has been cornered and realizes that he cannot earn eternal life, and as a result, he “pivots” to “save face,” looking for a “way out” by pressuring Jesus to define, reveal, and set boundaries on whom he is to love. Essentially, he wants Jesus to “get him off the hook” for the impossibility of fulfilling the essence of the law. He wants the “scope” of his love and a “checklist” of who he can “write off” to justify those he has failed to love.

2. The illustration and implications of being a good neighbor (v.30-37)

- Instead of answering the lawyer’s question, Jesus told a parable.

Setting (v.30): an unnamed man travels from Jerusalem to Jericho on a 17-mile stretch downhill, as Jerusalem is 2500 feet above sea level and Jericho is 800 feet below sea level. This road is notorious for being dangerous. He is beaten, stripped of his clothes and belongings, and left for dead.

A. Two loveless neighbors (v.31-32):

- The priest and Levite saw this man on the ground and passed by him on the other side (v.31-32).

Why did they “pass” on the other side?

- Were they in a hurry to get home? Were they afraid of being ambushed? Was it because they didn’t want to be blamed for beating the man up? Did they think he was already dead? Did they want to avoid becoming ritually unclean (Lev. 21:1-3; Num. 5:2; 19:2-13; Ezek. 44:22-27)? Luke does not tell us why they refused to help. All that matters is that they did not.

B. One loving neighbor (v.33-35):

- A Samaritan saw him and had compassion. This man was so bruised and beaten that he was perceived to be “almost dead.”
- Historians indicate a shortage of wardrobes in the early 30s AD. This Samaritan ruined his own clothing so he could bandage the wounded traveler. After bandaging him with his clothing, he poured wine (disinfectant) and oil (moisturizer) on his wounds. The man’s injuries were so bad from the beating that the Samaritan had to pick him up, place him on his donkey, and walk alongside them until reaching an inn.
- The Samaritan found an inn and paid for all the needs of the injured man.

Dialogue #6: Jesus → the lawyer, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” (v.36)

Dialogue #7: the lawyer → Jesus, “The one who showed mercy.” (v.37)

Dialogue #8: Jesus → the lawyer, “You go, and do likewise.” (v.37)

The question Jesus asks the lawyer is different than the question of the lawyer (v.29, 36):

- The lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” or “What are the qualifications someone needs to meet for me to consider them a neighbor?”
- Jesus asks, “Who proves to be a neighbor?” or “Who is the neighbor?”

*The lawyer wants a noun to define the neighbor. Jesus gives him a verb. The lawyer wants to know who his neighbor is. Jesus tells him to be a neighbor.

Principles of being neighborly:

- Extending mercy always comes at a personal cost with no expectation of reciprocation. Love, mercy, and compassion must always be tempered with discernment, wisdom, discretion, and stewardship. Mercy, compassion, and love must never enable another person’s sin.

This required love can only be given by God, Who is love and dispenses love toward Himself through those born of the Spirit (Gal. 5:14, 22-23; 1 Jn. 4:7-11). Ultimately, mercy is birthed from the one who has received mercy.

This “parable of the law” will confirm whether the lawyer belongs in the category of “children” or the “wise” (v.21). Will he repent of his sin, or will he continue to justify himself, though he has broken the essence of the law?

The question is not “Who is my neighbor?” but “Am I a loving neighbor?”