SESSION THREE
The Good Samaritan

SCRIPTURE
Luke 10:25-37

THE POINT
Jesus’ compassion leads Christians to be compassionate toward others.

CHARACTERS
• Jesus: the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

PLOT
The story of the good Samaritan is another one of Jesus’ most well-known parables. An expert in the law came to Jesus and tried to test Him by asking a pretty straightforward question: How do I gain eternal life? Jesus’ response was also straightforward: Obey the Old Testament commands of loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbor as you love yourself. To clarify even further, Jesus told a story about a Samaritan who stopped to help a man that not even the Jewish leaders stopped to help. The story featured an unlikely hero who demonstrated that loving your neighbor means loving all people.
Some readers immediately think the question is about going to heaven after you die. But in its first-century context, the question would have had a different meaning. Asking about the way to inherit eternal life meant something like this: “Teacher, how can I make sure I will be part of God’s kingdom when the Messiah comes and establishes His reign on earth? How can I make sure that whenever God returns to His people and makes everything right I’m will be part of that inheritance?”

Note Jesus’ response to the expert in verse 26. Jesus basically said, “You’re the expert in the law, so tell me what you find there.” Jesus often responded to a question by asking another question. It’s a way to reveal the heart behind the question. And that’s what He did here.

Notice how the man responded. He quoted the two greatest commandments—love God and love your neighbor. Jesus Himself said on another occasion that the whole Old Testament—the Law and the Prophets—could be summed up this way (Matt. 22:36-40).

But here’s the catch, and we’ll see how the heart of the man was revealed in the next part of this passage: Who can fully and at all times love God and their neighbors as they are called to? If complete obedience to the law is required to inherit eternal life, then how could the lawyer make sure he was okay? Who can say they are without fault where complete obedience is concerned?

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’”

Jesus showed what compassion looks like

Simple question, simple answer. “You want to inherit eternal life? Love God and love your neighbor.” But that answer implies full devotion—a perfection of love for God and people that none of us, if we’re honest, can possibly fulfill. Not surprisingly, the expert felt the sting of the law’s condemnation, namely the law’s exposure of his failure to love God and his neighbor as he ought. And so, he quickly responded with another question, one that he hoped would justify him.

Jesus commands us to be compassionate to others

After telling the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked a question of His own. And look how Jesus’ question differed from the original question asked by the law expert.

Do you see how Jesus changed the question? Basically, the expert in the law asked, “Whom do I need to see as my neighbor?” Jesus’ question was different. His focus was on to whom you can be a neighbor. Instead of limiting the circle to a few “neighbors,” He widened it without limit.

• What is the difference between doing acts of compassion and being a compassionate person?
ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Social Concern
All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

Luke 10:36-37
36 “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”
37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

CHRIST CONNECTION
While the story of the good Samaritan is certainly intended to be a story that responds to the expert’s question about who qualifies as our neighbor, there remains the strong connection that this story hints at Jesus being the One who comes and, at great cost to Himself, shows us compassion. There is a sense in which Jesus is “the great Samaritan”—the One who takes charge of our welfare and shows us compassion when we are helpless.

Surely, this was one of the lessons the expert in the law needed to learn. He thought if he could simply whittle down the law to two main commandments and then limit the circle of neighbors, he might be able to justify himself. But Jesus smashed all of those assumptions with the story He told. We trust in the compassion and mercy of God for salvation, and only then are we able to show compassion and mercy to others.
God’s Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▸ What do you think about the man’s answer to Jesus’ question?

▸ Why do you think the two religious leaders passed by the man in distress? What are some modern day examples of something similar happening?

▸ What reasons do we give when we want to “pass by on the other side” and not show compassion?

▸ What are some key takeaways for you personally after hearing the story of the good Samaritan?
YOUR MISSION

HEAD

The promise of heaven (when we die) and the new heavens and new earth (at the end of time) is that we will be forever with God and His people. Life today is preparation for eternal life in the future, and the love we will share in the future must invade the present and fill us with compassion. Jesus said, “Do this, and you are really living.”

- Place yourself in this scene. If Jesus had told you that the way to inherit eternal life is by loving God and loving others, how would you have responded? What questions would you have asked?
- What do you think these different aspects of loving God (heart, soul, strength, mind) refer to, and why do they matter?

HEART

The parable is challenging to hear, but it also opens up new perspectives and imagination. And it raises a number of questions. Why do people, even those who are religious, fail to show compassion when required? What does compassion look like? How should we consider the cost of compassion and the responsibility for other people’s welfare? The parable stirs our hearts in a way that shows us the truth, instead of just telling us. And the truth Jesus showed in this story is that compassion and love for our neighbors crosses boundaries and overcomes obstacles.

- What can we learn from the Samaritan’s sacrificial actions on behalf of the wounded man?
- What are some practical ways we can also show compassion to people in need?

HANDS

We cannot come to the end of this parable without feeling the full weight of Jesus’ instruction to us. Now that we have received the compassion of God, shown to us most clearly in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are commissioned to love our neighbors by showing mercy to those in need. This is why Christians have always been, or should always be, on the front lines of mercy ministry. These activities are not just things we “check off” on our to-do list. Generosity toward the needy is not something we do; generous is something we are.

- What does it say about us as Christians if we fail to be compassionate?
- How does our ministry of mercy back up what we say we believe about God’s mercy to us?