

Sunday 28 April 2024

Life Group Leaders' Notes

Series: Now Is The Time

Title: Now Is The Time To Rescue Our Neighbours

Key Text: Luke 10:25-37

Who cares for you? Who do you care for? It's clear that the world and every person in it are in great need of love.

2000 years ago, an expert in the law asked Jesus: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Whilst this question may have seemed well meaning, the Bible says he was actually a lawyer testing Jesus (Luke 10:26-29). The legal expert gave the right theological answer but had entirely missed the real heart of these commands to love God and love others with everything we are - no excuses.

Jesus' next answer was brilliant, and it deals with the heart of Christianity. For your and my neighbour is anyone and everyone. To illustrate this, Jesus told a famous story about a man travelling on one of the most notorious roads in Israel. Many people had been attacked on this 17-mile road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Everyone knew this road. Everyone knew it was best to take an alternative road. But one guy was on this road and was badly beaten up, left for dead (Luke 10:30-37). This story brought home what it really means to love your neighbour and who your neighbour is. In a few sentences Jesus showed how we must never become too busy or self-absorbed to care for one another as we go about our own business in life. Everyone is our neighbour, no matter what race, creed or colour.

We see some simple lessons which will help us show God's love to our neighbours too:

1. He saw the man and took pity on him (Luke 10:33)
2. He stopped what he was doing and went to the man (Luke 10:31-34)
3. He bandaged the man's wounds (Luke 10:34; Isaiah 40:1)
4. He poured on oil and wine (Luke 10:34; Matthew 26:27-28)

5. He brought the man to safety and looked after him (Luke 10:34)
6. He sacrificed to care for the man (Luke 10:35; Matthew 25:40)
7. He made a plan to look after him in future (Luke 10:35-37; James 2:15-17; Acts 4:34; 1 John 4:20-21 MSG)

Apply

1. He saw the man and took pity on him (Luke 10:33). He saw a human being who was attacked by robbers: so many people today have suffered physical violence and been robbed not only of possessions but of their hope and peace of mind; Stripped of his clothes: To be stripped is to be humiliated. Maybe you have been stripped of your dignity and self-image by being abused or by wrong actions of others; beaten: means you have lost the battle. You've been overpowered by enemies, addictions or circumstances; abandoned: means you are on your own, rejected and cast aside; left to die: means you are in such a bad way that it's all over unless someone helps you. Of course this describes the experiences of Jesus, who gave His life so that we can have life. But it also describes the experiences of so many people and maybe also where you are at right now. Do we see the pain in people's eyes? Do we see evil that is ruining people right before our eyes? So often we don't see the need. We need to stop and look in people's eyes. For example the growing incidents of sex trafficking involving people working in public places has been called 'human slavery hidden in plain sight.' Often the need is not hidden, we just aren't seeing it. The Good Samaritan is a wonderful example of love that begins with really seeing the needs of others.

2. He stopped what he was doing and went to the man (Luke 10:34). The Good Samaritan stopped, and we need to stop too. Stop what we're doing. Stop our plans. See the need in front of us and actually do something about it! How often do we make excuses? There were two others in this story who also saw this victim (Luke 10:31-32). Not one but two religious leaders found the man, one after the other. When he saw them, the man must have thought his rescue had come! But both chose to distance themselves and continued walking by. Maybe they were too busy. Maybe they didn't want to get dirty. Maybe they thought the whole situation was just too risky. For whatever reason, they didn't stop and go to him. But

then a sworn enemy of the Jews came: a Samaritan. Yet this enemy, from a race despised by the Jews, came to the rescue. Both priest and Levite here show how it is possible to have a religious identity without really having a love for people in need.

Before we condemn them, it would be better to examine our own hearts: how much need do we see without doing anything about it? How easy is it for you to focus on your own life when actually you could be helping a lot more people? If we really see a need it should lead us to stop and go to people.

3. He bandaged the man's wounds (Luke 10:34). So many people have wounds in their hearts: wounds of abuse, wounds caused by cruel words, wounds from rejection, betrayal and broken relationships. He put bandages on the man to stop the bleeding. How can we put bandages on and minister to people's hearts? We can do what God said to the Jewish people and speak words of comfort, words of hope (Isaiah 40:1). Speak kindly to people. Show them the love of Jesus. Let them see it in your eyes, words and actions.

4. He poured on oil and wine (Luke 10:34). The Good Samaritan used oil and wine to soothe and disinfect the wounds. We always need to be sensitive and gentle with people whose wounds may or may not be obvious. The oil is widely understood to symbolise the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, priests, prophets and kings were anointed with oil and the Holy Spirit would come upon them. We receive the Holy Spirit when we give our lives to Jesus, believing in His death and resurrection, and accepting Him as our Lord. The Holy Spirit compels us to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working through us we can see people's lives transformed. The wine symbolises the blood of Jesus (Matthew 26:27-28). Derek Prince writes of the Divine Exchange that we can receive: forgiveness for punishment; healing instead of wounds; righteousness for sinfulness; life for death; glory for shame; poverty for riches; and acceptance instead of rejection. The blood of Jesus has power to transform lives and situations.

5. He brought the man to safety and looked after him (Luke 10:34). The Good Samaritan did everything he could to look after the person in need in front of him and take him out of that dangerous place. Would you use your nice car to get a bleeding, dirty person to hospital, or

call a taxi? In that moment, his own needs and comfort took second place. The early days of a person's recovery or new life as a Christian need careful oversight. He changed his plans, his priorities, and was willing to personally commit to caring for the other man, to ensure he was out of danger and could make a full recovery.

6. He sacrificed to care for the man (Luke 10:35). Real care requires real sacrifice. He paid a significant sum of money – 2 days' wages - to ensure this total stranger was well cared for. Jesus said we must go out of our way to care for the people that no one else cares for. It will always cost us something to care. It will cost us time, effort and maybe cash to do what Jesus said we must: feed the hungry, give the thirsty a drink, look after the homeless, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit those in prison (Matthew 25:40). As a church we've always given generously to people in need (e.g. support during the pandemic in South Africa; 40 years+ supporting schools and projects like clean water wells in Burkina Faso). Are you willing to sacrifice your time, money, your plans or 'quiet night in', or your comfort to really care for those in need?

7. He made a plan to look after him in future (Luke 10:35). He consolidates him, showing him aftercare. The Good Samaritan doesn't just leave him. He intended to return to help his recovery. We too must be faithful in ministering to people at all stages of their development. This is real Christianity. Every action of the Good Samaritan showed that he really loved and cared. And Jesus said 'Go and do likewise'. Real Christianity then is for sure about words, but it is also shown by our actions (James 2:15-17). Thank God that the early church modelled this all-round care for people (Acts 4:34). All through history and still today, many of the greatest social care projects and humanitarian reforms have been led and supported by Christians. Great movements like the Salvation Army were started by Christians and continue to be supported by those who care for people's bodies as well as their souls. Today, God wants you to know that you are cared for. But He wants to make us also His agents of care to show in every way His compassion for the world. Our first love for God must spread to all people - beyond the bounds of age, race, and social status (1 John 4:20-21 MSG).