

COMMISSIONED

THE ART OF LIVING OUT THE
WORDS, WAYS, & MISSION OF JESUS

2.3 Guided Activity

Reading and Studying

Heather Zempel,, Dream Co Executive Director
National Community Church

This week, we've begun exploring what it means to read Scripture and to study Scripture. Let's work through a specific passage together.

First, we will read it together. As we read, listen for what the words say. Then, we will use our study tools to bring some clarity to what it meant and then what it means for us today.

Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took

pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii 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."

First, let's consider the genre or type of writing that we are dealing with. In this particular passage, we actually have a genre within a genre. It's a historical narrative... an account of an actual conversation that Jesus had in a real time in a real place with a real person. Embedded in that conversation, Jesus uses a teaching device called a parable.

A parable is a story that is intended to awaken the imagination to a deeper understanding about God or his kingdom.

Telling parables was not unique to Jesus. In fact, it was standard practice for most first century Jewish rabbis to teach in parables. What made Jesus stand out was his brilliance in connecting dots in Old Testament texts and the unexpected twists and turns he would give to his stories.

For example, parables about the Priest, the Levite, and the Pharisee were very common in that culture. It was like the priest, the rabbi, and the minister go into a bar joke. And in those parables, the Priest and the Levite screw up and the Pharisee does the right thing and proves to be the hero of the story. So when Jesus begins, a Priest, a Levite, everyone's nodding, okay we know this story. Until... it's not a Pharisee. But a Samaritan who comes on the scene, does the right thing, and becomes the hero of the story.

Geography

The next tool is geography—do a quick google search for a map to give you a sense of space and place. Jericho is northeast of Jerusalem, there is a 3300 ft drop in elevation. Many of the priests that worked in the temple of Jerusalem lived in Jericho, so they would make this journey when it was time for their rotation of duties.

History

History. I will touch on this one very quickly. Samaritans and Jews had a long history of strife. They were bitter enemies. They hated each other. How does that play into this story?

Culture

When we talk about culture, we are talking about worldviews, customs, language, traditions. Three quick things to mention here.

First, the characters. Priest, a Levite and a Samaritan.

The priests were in charge of sacrifices and religious leadership of the temple. The Levites were their helpers. And Samaritans, as we just mentioned, had a long and antagonistic relationship with the Jewish people.

Then there's language- the word "half-dead." We tend to read that as "he was in really bad shape." But to the original audience "half-dead" immediately brings to mind a problem with ritual purity. Ritual purity is not about sin but about readiness for worship. You could not touch a corpse and enter into temple worship. If the Priest or Levite were to engage, they would be risking becoming ritually impure and being put out of work.

Finally, economics. Jesus doesn't just say that the Good Samaritan paid the innkeeper but that he specifically gave two denarii. Which is the equivalent of 2 days pay, which I think is just interesting to note.

Spirituality

Our final tool is spirituality. What was the religious and spiritual world of the text that we are reading.

In our 21st century western context, we tend to learn by information download. In first century Judaism, learning was driven by question asking.

In our 21st century western context, we tend to connect Biblical passages together theologically or topically. But in first century Judaism, they would also connect Biblical passages together linguistically. For example...

What Jesus is doing here is actually quite brilliant. There are at least four places in the Old Testament that begin with the Hebrew construction *Ve' ahavta*. In English, "and you shall love." The first is Deuteronomy 6:5- "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The second is Leviticus 19:18- And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The lawyer connected those to commandments together to answer Jesus question... and Jesus agreed. But then the lawyer asked a follow up question- which people. Who is my neighbor? How far is love required to go? What are the boundaries, the limits? Who is in, who is out?

And Jesus pulled that linguistic thread to the third text found in Leviticus 19:34- and you shall love the foreigner. But he didn't quote the verse.

COMMISSIONED

He told a story. And he didn't cast just any foreigner- he cast the Samaritan. When Jesus was asked to define his theology—to define who must I love, Jesus obliterated the boundaries. To love God means you love your neighbor. Even the one who hates you.

A man is beaten up and left half-dead. A priest passes by, a Levite passes by. Again, the audience isn't shocked by their lack of action, it would have put their jobs at risk.

But then enters the Samaritan.

The outsider. The foreigner. The enemy.

Who sees the man. Who slows down. Enters into the mess of the situation. And makes personal sacrifice for restoration.

The one who was hated. Loved regardless.

To summarize the entire law as Love God and Love Neighbor was not entirely unique to Jesus. What was unique to Jesus—your enemy is your neighbor. You are to love the one who hates you.

Ethnic differences? Love regardless
Political differences? Love regardless
Years of hatred and animosity? Love regardless

At the end of the story, Jesus asked the young lawyer- who proved to be neighbor. The lawyer responded “the one who showed mercy.” He's not only giving the right answer. He's demonstrating he's picking up on the Biblical thread Jesus has been pulling and quotes the fourth place where we find the phrase Ve' ahavta— in Micah 6:8- and you shall love mercy.

Love God
Love Neighbor
Love Your Enemy
Love Mercy
Love Regardless

When you study... ask

What does the text say?

What does it mean? - What insights do we pull from the genre, geography, history, culture, and spirituality?

What does it mean for us today?