

Think Smaller – Like a Good Neighbor

8.28.22

Luke 10:25-37

Sunday AM

**Have you ever watched the State of the Union?** In recent yrs, our Presidents have taken a moment in their address to recognize an ordinary citizen for some act of heroism. This custom began in 1982 when Ronald Reagan introduced *Lenny Skutnik* – and to this day reporters will ask presidential aides before the SOTU who the “Skutnicks” will be this year. Skutnik was a federal worker minding his own business in January 1982 when *Air Florida Flight 90* crashed into the Potomac at the 14<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge. As onlookers gathered near the bridge watching in horror, the few survivors were being pulled to safety by a rope ladder dropped from a helicopter. As Skutnik watched the event unfold, there was a lady who was unable to hold on to the rope – and she was beginning to drown. So, as the gathering crowd shouted their encouragement, Skutnik broke thru the police barricade, jumped into the icy river – and risking his own life, pulled her to safety. W/in a few days, at the SOTU, President Reagan called Skutnik a hero. ***Do you know what Jesus would’ve called him? A GOOD NEIGHBOR!***

For (3) weeks we’ve been talking about the need to ***Think Smaller***. *Think Smaller* is more than the year-2 initiative of our ***Aim Higher, Dream Bigger*** focus – it is a call for each of us to live intentionally relational in every essential relationship in our lives.

To *Think Smaller* is an invitation to reprioritize what it means to connect w/ God, our spouse/kids, our church family, and w/ our missional relationships w/ the world around us. To zoom in, lean into, and dig deeper into the people our lives intersect w/ daily.

In week 1, we discussed how to live *intentionally relational* w/ God and how it’s the springboard to every other relationship. In week 2, we discussed how to live *intentionally relational* in our homes. Last week, we talked about the need to live *intentionally relational* in our spiritual relationships w/ other believers to spur each other along in the faith. Today, I want to discuss living ***intentionally missional*** in our everyday lives where we live, work, and play.

**SEE** – it may surprise you, but God never intended for His people to live in holy huddles shunning the world – instead, He’s called us to be good neighbors who go into our world (w/out becoming like the world), to share His love/grace w/ everyone w/ meet to positively influence them to His grace/mercy. ***He’s called us to risk our lives to rescue those who are perishing.***

**WTM** – turn w/ me to Luke 15:11-32

*One day an expert in the Law stood up to test Jesus by asking him a question: “Rabbi, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said, “What does the Law of Moses say? The man said, “You must love the Lord your God w/ all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind – and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said, “You are correct. Do this and you will live!” But wanting to justify his actions, the man asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied w/ a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance, a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road. A Levite also walked over and looked at him lying there, but he too passed by on the other side. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to the man, the Samaritan soothed his wounds w/ olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then, he put the man on his donkey and took him to an inn to take care of him. The next day, he gave the innkeeper two silver coins, and told him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher, I will pay you the next time I’m here.’” Jesus asked, “Which of the three would you say was a neighbor to the man who’d been attacked?” The man said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said, “Go and do the same.”*

W/out question, this parable is one of the most familiar of all of Jesus' teachings containing multiple lessons relevant to our lives today – yet none is greater than if we genuinely love God w/ all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, then we will also love and be concerned for other people just as God loves and cares for us.

**Contextually**, an expert in the Law came to Jesus w/ a provocative, yet relevant question. Whether he was sincere or just out to cause Jesus to stumble is unclear, yet his question is easily the most essential question in life – **what must I do to have eternal life?** Or, *what must I do to be right w/ God?* This is the primary point of this parable! Yet not to be lost is the expectation of God for His people to be good neighbors to all people.

Notice how Jesus answered his question w/ a question – **why don't you tell me?** And his answer was on target. Quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, he replied – *to have eternal life one must love God w/ all their mind, heart, soul, and strength and then love their neighbor as they love themselves.* And Jesus agreed w/ him – **You are absolutely correct!**

Now, if the expert would've left it there, then we might've missed Jesus' point – but the Bible says the man **wanting to justify himself** asked a 2<sup>nd</sup> question – Jesus can you tell me **who exactly is my neighbor?**

This question launched Jesus into this parable to make His point – a point that even today, most people miss. **SEE** – the man asks, **who's my neighbor** – and Jesus, changing the focus said, the question isn't, who is my neighbor? The question is – **what kind of neighbor will you be?**

**SEE** – in this story, there are (5) kinds of neighbors.

- **Predators** – Users, Abusers, and Accusers
- **Pious** – So heavenly-minded their no earthy good
- **Pretentious** – Too high/mighty to be bothered
- **Passive** – Indifferent and unconcerned
- **Personal** – the willing, able, and concerned

### Key Qualities to Living Intentionally Missional

#### 1 – **LOVE** God Fully

As w/ every **horizontal** relationship, it begins w/ our **vertical** connection w/ God. If I love God w/ all of my heart, mind, soul, and strength – I can't help but to love other people in the same manner as I want to be loved.

This is the heart of the 10 Commandments – if we get the 1<sup>st</sup> (4) right – which deals w/ our relationship w/ God, then we'll be enabled to get the 2<sup>nd</sup> (6) right – which deal w/ our interaction w/ people. Still, when we love God fully, it will always result in loving people in the same way God loves them. Yet to love God more than anyone or anything else – including ourselves – is a daily fight that requires *daily pursuit, vigilant honesty, selfless focus,* and *great compassion.*

#### 2 – **THINK** Rightly of Yourself

In comparison to the other characters in this parable – I think Jesus was trying to help His listeners to appreciate the idea of genuine humility.

**B/c of our sinful nature**, we're programmed to think about ourselves first, and maybe others second – but usually only if in caring for others we can help ourselves. But when we realize who we are in light of who God is, we recognize that just like everyone else – if not for the grace of God, we too would be lost in a sea of selfish gratification and indulgence.

This is why encounters like what we see in **Isaiah 6** are so essential to our lives – b/c they remind us that not one of us is any better than anyone else – we're just all sinners in need of God's grace.

*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but w/ sober judgment, in accordance w/ the faith God has distributed to each of you. Romans 12:3*

**SEE** – to think rightly of one's self requires we never overvalue/undervalue our person, abilities, blessings, or worth, but that we think humbly accurately of ourselves in light of God's grace to us.

This is the key to stopping, helping, and caring for others in their time of need instead of passing by on the other side. When we see ourselves honestly by God's standard of holiness instead of by the economy of man – we're more likely to realize that we're just beggars in need of help.

Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. R.C. Sproul

When we see ourselves rightly/humbly, we tend to be willing to care for others at the point of their need as we'd hope for others to care for us when we're in need.

But if our tendency is to be a *passer-by*, it's likely b/c we think more highly of ourselves than we ought – which speaks to a greater spiritual condition and need.

### 3 – **PRIORITIZE** People Over Personal Agendas

Whether it was the thieves, priests, Levites, or innkeeper, each one had an excuse for how they responded to the man in need – their agendas came first. They weren't living w/ their eyes open to God moving, but w/ their eyes focused on themselves.

Have you ever heard of the Princeton Seminary Experiment by Darley/Batson? Inspired by the Good Samaritan parable, they took a group of Princeton Seminary students and told them they were to give a sermon across campus on the Good Samaritan. They gave the students a moment to prepare their thoughts and then sent them on their way. Some, they told them they were late – and to hurry. Some they said, if you leave now, you will make it on time. And some they said they had plenty of time to walk over. Then, along the way, they had an actor in need of help stationed along their journey. Of these future pastors preparing to preach this parable – only **10%** of the “late” group stopped, **45%** of the “on-time” group stopped, and **63%** of the “plenty of time” group stopped.

Their findings concluded that a person not in a hurry is more likely to help than a person who is in a hurry – and that one's sense of busyness and preoccupation w/ their agenda is most likely to influence their ability and willingness to help others in their time of need – even when going to speak on the Good Samaritan.

**POINT** – as God's children – God's mission, will, and purpose must be our primary concern above all of our earthly concerns or else we will miss out on the Divine opportunities God has for us to engage for us to be His hands, feet, and voice to others in need of Him.

### 4 – **TREAT** People the Way You Want to be Treated

This is ultimately God's hope/desire for His people – that we love others (and treat others) w/ the same generous compassion/grace that He loves them.

This is our jumping-off point. It's living the **Golden Rule** – *Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you.*

**Notice** – the idea isn't – *do unto others before they do unto you* – but as you'd have them do unto you.

I think this was Jesus' point to the expert in the Law – genuine faith and dependence on God always results in treating people w/ respect, concern, and compassion – no matter who they are, what they've done, how they live, and whether you agree politically w/ them or not.

**Why?** B/c there's something much greater at stake than the here/now – and that's the eternal. There's more at stake than our will, and that's God's will. There's more at stake than my comfort/convenience – it's a person's eternal destination.

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34-35*

**SEE** – it's thru our love for others that they're able to experience God's love for them. See – people aren't interested in God's love when our piety, legalism, and condemnation get in the way. But when they experience God in us loving them at the point of their need – in spite of their issues – they'll be more open to wanting God's love b/c they His love at work in us.

Or consider the words of John the Apostle in 1 John 4.

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, b/c God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live thru Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:7-11*

**Bottomline** – how we treat people makes a difference – an eternal difference when we treat them w/ dignity and respect whether we deserve it or not. This is why God has called us to love others as He loves them.

**And when we do** – it can change more than a relationship – it can change the world around us.

DYK that in 1995, (14) wolves were released into the wild at Yellowstone. At the time, scientists had no real expectation of how this action would radically affect the entire ecosystem of the park. Amazingly, there had been no wolves in Yellowstone for 70 yrs. During this time, the deer population grew rampant, severely damaging the local flora. Unwittingly, while these (14) wolves could not eat all the deer, they did force them to be more careful in choosing where they foraged and which parts of the park they lived. In those places, vegetation began to revive. In 6 years, the number of trees increased 5-fold. Beavers reappeared and began building dams. Muskrats, ducks, and fish bred in the new ponds. The wolves reduced the population of jackals, which led to an increase in the number of hare/mice. This in turn attracted hawks, ferrets, and foxes to the park. Bears thrived on the scraps of prey left by the wolves. Remarkably, the wolves even helped to change the flow of Yellowstone's rivers. River channels straightened and stabilized, and coastal erosion decreased. This happened b/c the influence of wolves on deer led to the explosive growth of trees along the banks of the rivers.

**Point** – the story of the Yellowstone wolves shows that while ecosystems are complex and interconnected – when all the parts are in balance, nature thrives.

I think the same is true for the ecosystem of mankind – when God's people live more like Good Samaritans instead of like priests/Levites – God love in us, living thru us. can change the world around us – but we have to live intentionally relational w/ all people.

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. Share w/ the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice w/ those who rejoice; mourn w/ those who mourn.*

*Live in harmony w/ one another. Don't be proud, but be willing to associate w/ people of low position. Do not be conceited. Don't repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace w/ everyone. Don't take revenge, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil w/ good. Romans 12:9-21*