

PUTTING LOVE INTO PRACTICE

SERIES: THE PARABLES OF JESUS



Catalog No. 20240901
Luke 10:25-37
Final Message
Dan Westman
September 1, 2024

Luke 10:25-37

Good morning! My name is Dan, and I am one of the pastors here at PBC. It is wonderful to be here with you all to worship, to open the Word together, and to meet with God.

This is the final week of our summer teaching series on The Parables of Jesus. What a rich summer it has been learning from Jesus how to live life in the kingdom of God!

Next week, we will start a new series in the book of 1 Corinthians. This is one of the longest of Paul's 13 letters that we find in the New Testament, and we will be in this book for the bulk of the next year, taking a few breaks along the way and finishing up early next summer.

Today, we are going to wrap up our study of the parables with one last parable: the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan is one of the most well-known of Jesus's parables. It is well-known not only by followers of Jesus but also by nearly everyone in our culture.

It is the only parable I know that has worked its way into our legal system. California (and every other state, for that matter) has a series of laws known as "Good Samaritan laws." Good Samaritan laws protect those who act in good faith when trying to provide emergency care to people in need without fear of being prosecuted or sued. In other words, if you are trying to be a Good Samaritan, stopping to help someone needing emergency medical attention or some other kind of emergency care, you can't get sued for trying to help, even if you are unsuccessful.

Interestingly enough, the purpose of these laws is to encourage people to be like a character in a parable that Jesus told some 2000 years ago. That's pretty remarkable.

Last week, Paul Taylor addressed the parable of the net, a parable about judgment. As he did, he acknowledged that judgment is not a topic that we enjoy talking about. It's not very fun to preach about either

because the idea of judgment makes us uncomfortable. It is at odds with the values and assumptions of our culture.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is exactly the opposite. Everyone loves this parable! It is a story that, at least in broad strokes, nearly everyone in our culture is familiar with. It teaches a lesson that virtually everyone is on board with. And yet, it is a parable that is so hard to put into practice. And sometimes, we, as the church, are even worse at putting it into practice than our friends and neighbors who don't follow Jesus.

Why is that? Why is this parable so hard to put into practice? Why isn't being a Good Samaritan just second nature to us? Those are the questions that we will consider together this morning.

So today, we will look at this familiar story and consider how we might embody it—how we might actually live it out.

Are you with me? Okay, let's jump in.

The setup

Before we get to the parable itself, we need to start with the conversation in which this parable is told. That conversation begins in Luke 10:25, where we will begin.

Luke 10:25-28:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ **He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"** ²⁷ **And he answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself."** ²⁸ **And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."**

This man who approaches Jesus is described as a lawyer. This is not exactly what we think of as a lawyer

who would be an expert in the laws of our nation or state. Rather, this was an expert in the Jewish religious law, the Law of Moses, the Old Testament. This man was a religious leader, and he is said to be putting Jesus to the test, as many other religious leaders did to Jesus.

His test is to see if Jesus knows the answer to one of the most fundamental questions a Jew could ask: What must I do to inherit eternal life? We might ask the question: What must I do to be saved? Or how do I make it to heaven? Or how can I be sure I will have a favorable outcome in the afterlife? All are essentially asking the same thing: how do I find salvation?

Jesus responds with a question, as he so often does. *You're the religious expert. What do you think?*

And this lawyer nails it. "You shall 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 you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In Matthew 22, Jesus himself gives almost the exact same answer when asked which commandment is the greatest. In the Gospel of Luke, where the parable of the Good Samaritan is found, Jesus never summarizes the law in such a succinct way. But here we have in from the mouth of this lawyer: Love God with every fiber of your being, and love your neighbor as yourself. He nails it. That is exactly the right answer.

And Jesus affirms him for it. *You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.*

If the story stopped there, we might think this lawyer went on to be a star student of Jesus. Maybe even a teacher's pet—the guy Jesus calls on whenever no one else knows the answer to his questions. But that is not how the story ends. Even though this guy knew all the right answers, we can see that something else was missing in his life.

Matthew 10:29:

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

We see here that this is not a question asked out of curiosity. It is a question asked from a defensive posture. He is trying to justify himself. Why? Because he knew he did not actually love his neighbor. Sure, he knew all the right things, but he didn't *practice* the right things. His head was in the right place, but his heart and his actions

certainly were not. He had the right information, but his life had not undergone any meaningful transformation.

Can I just say that, like this lawyer, who was smart and educated and knew the Scriptures inside and out, we are in danger of making the same mistake that this guy did? Here, at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, we are facing the same temptation that this first-century Jewish lawyer faced. We are in danger of having the right information but lacking any real transformation.

Have you ever had a moment when the Bible just came alive for you? For me, this happened when I was in college. I was an undergraduate Bible major at Biola, and in the fall of my freshman year, I was taking an Old Testament survey. Two professors taught this class, and I got the least popular of the two. But during that class, this book came alive to me! I realized that there was a depth to God's Word that I had been missing. I began putting pieces together that I had missed and making connections I had never made. I fell in love with studying this book.

You don't have to have gone to Bible college to have had this experience. Maybe it was during your campus fellowship when you were first taught inductive Bible study. Maybe it was a friend who invited you to a Bible study. Maybe it was here at PBC, through the sermons, the Leadership Institute or a discipleship group. The words started jumping off the page, and you realized there was depth to this book that you had never realized existed. Not everyone has had that experience, but many of us have. That might even be why you are here at Peninsula Bible Church.

But there is a temptation for those of us in that category that we would begin to use our knowledge of Scripture as the gauge for our spiritual maturity. This is a real temptation because there is often a correlation between the degree to which we know this book and the degree of our spiritual maturity—especially in the early stages of faith.

But, we must remember that knowledge of Scripture is not the same thing as spiritual maturity—that information does not automatically lead to transformation. So, we are not here this morning to merely learn something new. We are not here merely to engage our minds with some new content. No, we are here because we believe transformation is possible. Because we believe that, by the Spirit of God, we might actually become people who love our neighbor more today than we did yesterday. *That* is what we are after.

This lawyer had information, but his life lacked transformation. That comes out in his question, *Tell me, Jesus, who really is my neighbor?*

The Parable

So Jesus responds with a story—a parable that we all know as the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Luke 10:30-35:

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.””

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was about 17 miles long and descended nearly 3,600 feet as it weaved through rocky desert terrain. This route was notorious for robberies since it was secluded and provided many places for robbers to hide close to the road.

Jesus tells the story of a man who was traveling along the road, was attacked by such robbers, beaten severely, and left naked and half-dead on the roadside. Horrible, but, unfortunately, not unheard of.

Not one, but two men happen to be walking down this road shortly after this incident—the first a priest and the second a Levite, both religious leaders. The priest is said specifically to be coming down from Jerusalem, probably after completing a period of work in the temple. These two men were men of privilege and prestige. They had the right pedigree, religiously and culturally. They knew the law and even taught the law to others.

As they saw this man lying half dead on the side of the road, they walked to the other side, deliberately avoiding him, and continued on their way.

Why did they choose not to help this man? Certainly not because there were no Good Samaritan laws in effect yet! They were not worried about getting sued. So why did they do this?

Jesus doesn't tell us, but we could venture a few guesses. Perhaps they were worried about becoming ceremonially unclean. This man was half-dead and could die at any moment. The law said that if you touched a corpse, you were unclean for seven days. Perhaps these religious men did not want to risk this.

Perhaps they were afraid. Obviously, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a dangerous place to be. Maybe the robbers were still nearby, and they were concerned for their own safety.

Perhaps they were busy. This man obviously was going to need a lot of help if they chose to give help. Maybe the priest and Levite had other obligations to attend to and didn't feel they had the time.

We don't know. We aren't told why these men don't stop. The point is that they don't. In fact, they go out of their way to avoid this man rather than stopping to help him.

We sometimes do the same thing, don't we? We sometimes choose to avoid people in need, and we do so for a number of different reasons.

I'll never forget the moment one summer during college when I passed by someone on the other side of the road. I had just started a new summer job. I was with a group of coworkers, walking to get lunch on our break. We didn't have a lot of time, so we were moving quickly. As we walked up to the restaurant, a man out front was walking with a stick, obviously blind. He was trying to find the ramp to walk up to the restaurant. I was near the back of this group of coworkers, and as we approached this man, I wondered if someone was going to offer to help him. Surely, this was the right thing to do. But as we approached, no one said anything. No one stopped. No one offered to help. Should I stop to help? I knew that I should, yet I also continued right on past this man.

Now, without a doubt, I made the wrong decision in that moment. I had a bunch of reasons why I made that decision—lots of ways that I justified it in my mind, even though I knew it was wrong.

I was in a hurry. Our lunch break was short, and if I stopped, I might not have enough time to eat or might be late getting back to work.

I was afraid of what my coworkers would think. They all chose to pass by this man. Would they think I was weird if I chose to stop and help?

I tried to downplay the need. This man will find his way eventually. He doesn't really need my help. And I'm sure someone else will be by shortly — sure they could help if he really needs help.

But the reality was that these were all just excuses—excuses to not do something I knew was right.

Maybe you have been there as well. A coworker begins to open up about some difficult issues in their personal life and you think to yourself, *I don't want to pry. Our relationship is a professional relationship. It's not really my place to get involved in their personal life. And I'm sure they have other friends who can help them with these things.*

Or you pass by a young woman outside the grocery store with a sign asking for help. And you say to yourself, *I don't really know how to help this person. I could give money, but I don't know how she will actually use it. And anything I give wouldn't really address the larger issues in her life. And I don't really have time to talk to her and understand her true needs—I'm trying to get in and out of Trader Joe's to get home and make dinner for my family.*

We find ourselves in these kinds of situations all the time—faced with someone in need of some kind or another and doing all the mental calculus on whether we should help. Many of these situations are complex situations where it is not obvious how we might be able to help. And yet, I think more often than not, we look for excuses for why we don't have to help rather than looking for ways to opportunities to show love.

This is certainly what the priest and Levite did. Whatever their reasons may have been, they made up excuses to justify their actions and passed by this man on the other side of the road.

Then, a third man comes down the road. This man was not a priest. He was not a Levite. In fact, he wasn't even a proper Jew. He was a Samaritan. There was a feud between Jews and Samaritans that was centuries old by this time. The history of the feud was religious, ethnic, and social, but it is hard to overstate the animosity that Jews felt toward Samaritans. This Samaritan was an outsider, no doubt. He ought to be the villain, certainly not the hero.

And yet, the contrast between the actions of this Samaritan and the Jewish religious leaders who came before him could not be more stark. The Samaritan sees the bloodied man and *has compassion* for him. He empathizes with him. He feels his pain. The Samaritan's first response is internal: compassion.

But this internal response does not stay on the inside. It very quickly moves to the outside. His compassion very quickly translates into action. He approaches the man, not sure how close to death he actually is. But thinking he might be able to help, he treats his wounds and wraps them in bandages. Then he puts the man up on his donkey, brings him to an inn, and pays whatever is necessary for this man's care.

He offers his time, his money, and, most importantly, perhaps, his attention. He cares for this man at his own expense and helps him in any way he can.

A compassion that translates into action—this is what love looks like.

Love starts with seeing a need. It allows that need to impact us so that we feel compassion. And it quickly moves from compassion into action.

It can be so easy to stop at compassion. We see a need, and we feel bad. We empathize. But then we make up excuses for why we don't need to get involved. Such a responses calls attention to a deeper issue: a lack of love.

The takeaway

Jesus wants to expose the lack of love in the heart of this lawyer, so he asks him a question.

Luke 10:36-37:

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."

The parable makes the point as clear as day. What does it look like to love our neighbor? To show mercy to those in need. To experience compassion, and to let that compassion translate into action.

Once again, the lawyer gets the answer right. But the question remains: will he go and do it? Will he put it into action?

This is the question for us as well. Will we put this into action?

I have no doubt that most of us here, maybe even all of us, want to put this into action. We want to do a better job of loving our neighbor. We want to let our compassion translate into action. And yet we find that difficult to do at times.

So, how do we grow in love for our neighbor?

Let me offer a few suggestions that are both Biblical and very practical.

If you want to become the kind of person who is more loving to your neighbor, my first suggestion is to practice self-care. This might sound a little counter-intuitive. Isn't loving your neighbor about caring for others? Yes, of course. But to care well for others, we have to first take care of ourselves.

We see Jesus doing this all the time. Jesus regularly withdraws from the crowds—and all the needs they brought with them—to spend time with his Father. He practiced the Sabbath—one day out of seven devoted to rest and worship. He slept. I love the story when he is on the boat with the disciples and a storm starts. Everyone is panicking, and Jesus is sleeping. Yes, this shows us that Jesus was not worried about the storm. It also shows us that he likes to sleep. I don't know about you, but I find it *much* easier to be loving when I am getting enough sleep. That might be a good place to start.

My second suggestion for becoming the kind of person who is more loving to your neighbor is to practice self-denial. Yes, practice self-care. But we must also practice self-denial. My use of the word practice is very intentional. We don't just accidentally become good at denying ourselves. We have to practice it. This is where the practice of fasting comes in. Fasting is voluntarily denying our body of something that it needs (food) so that we might align our souls with our deeper need for God. Fasting is one way to practice self-denial so that when an opportunity comes to sacrifice our well-being in service of another, we are better equipped to do so.

While these two things (practicing self-care and practicing self-denial) are both super helpful and very biblical, my third suggestion is by far the most important

and the most fundamental. If we want to become the kind of people who are more full of love for our neighbor, we need to deepen our awareness of and understanding of God's love for us.

That's right. Before we can love others, we must understand the love that God has for us. Listen to what John says in one of his letters.

1 John 4:10-11:

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Our capacity to love God and to love other people, deeply, genuinely, and wholeheartedly, flows directly from the love that we have experienced from God. We do not love God so that he will love us. We do not love others to make ourselves lovable to God. No, we love God and we love our neighbor because God has first loved us.

So, we must learn to become more aware of the love God has for us. We need to let his love wash over us and sink into us—into the deep places of our hearts, into the places where we don't feel lovable, into the secret places that we would rather keep to ourselves. We need to let God's love sink deeply into our hearts, minds, and souls.

Then, the natural outcome of this will be a love that overflows back to God and to others.

One way to deepen our awareness and understanding of God's love for us is to come to the communion table together. Communion serves as a physical, tangible reminder of God's self-giving love for us. As we prepare our hearts for communion, let me pray for us.

Lord, we want to be the kind of people who let our knowledge of you spill out of our lives into transformed living. We want to love others as you have loved us. We ask you to help us become the kind of people whose hearts and lives are filled with love for others and for you. Now, as we turn to communion, we pray that you would deepen our awareness of your love for us. Help us to know it. Help us to feel it. Help us to embody it. Help us to pour it out to those around us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.