

Hi, neighbor!

WEEK 1



HOOK

Main Point: Loving my neighbor is a demonstration of my love for God.

Activity – Break your LifeGroup into groups of three or four. Ask them to list famous neighbors from pop culture (e.g., Steve Urkel from *Family Matters*, Mr. Wilson from *Home Improvement*, Kramer from *Seinfeld*, etc.).

Q: Which of the people mentioned would you most like to have as your neighbor? Least?

Q: What traits are found in a good neighbor?

Q: Do neighbors have any responsibility toward others in their neighborhood? If so, what are those responsibilities?

BOOK

Main Point: Main Point: Loving my neighbor is a demonstration of my Love for God.

Read: Luke 10:25–28 [Read]

Talking Point #1: Loving my neighbor displays my true devotion to God.

Q: How do these two commandments summarize the whole law?

Q: How is loving our neighbor connected to loving God?

To properly understand the story of the Good Samaritan, we must understand its context. In Luke, the story of the Good Samaritan is sandwiched between Jesus' sending the 72 disciples on mission and the account of Mary and Martha. Luke is a master storyteller, weaving theology of the Spirit into the ministry of Jesus and the



story of salvation, particularly focusing on the inclusion of the Gentiles, the lost, the poor, the weak, the sick and the marginalized. In this section, Luke turned from the mission of His disciples toward *attitudes* His disciples should possess – love of God and love of neighbor.ⁱ In John, Jesus says our love for other people is how the world will know we are His disciples (John 13:35). The way we treat other people is what makes our faith tangible, what shows whether our faith is real instead of just lip service.

The lawyer asked Jesus, “What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?” He was looking for a checklist, as do students who look for the minimum work they have to do to pass a class. As it says later, he was looking to justify himself (v. 29). But the fact is, we cannot *do* anything to earn eternal life. These two commands that sum up all the law, which the lawyer gets right, are not works you *do*; they are relationships you have. Yet Jesus says, “*Do this and you will live,*” responding in kind to the lawyer’s question. Jesus was saying that it is our relationship with God that gives us eternal life, but real love isn’t passive. You don’t just *say* you love God and love others, you *do* it. Real love manifests itself in action.

The lawyer *understood* the law correctly. When Jesus asked him what the law said, he summarized it the same way Jesus did in the other Gospels – love God and love your neighbor. The question was, did he really *do* it? This was a question the Pharisees often argued about among themselves. There were 613 commandments in the law; how could they boil it down to just one statement?ⁱⁱ But these two laws summarized everything else in the law. Starting with the Ten Commandments – the first four are about loving God, the last six about loving your neighbor. The rest of the laws just flesh out those two ideas in practical application. If you love God and love others, you will follow the rest of the laws.

Love isn’t a good work, a rite, or a religious checklist. It’s a way of life. It’s “easier” than a religious to-do list and at the same time much harder. If we’re honest, none of us does this perfectly. No one on earth really loves God, much less others, with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength. So if this were a checklist type of work to get us into heaven, *none* of us would make it. Loving God and loving our neighbor aren’t religious “to dos,” they describe the *heart* of someone who is a disciple of Jesus. When we accept Christ, God gives us a new heart and His Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26–27) so we *can* love others the way that Jesus loves us (John 13:35).

We will see in the rest of this passage just how connected these two commands are. As John described so eloquently in his letter, we cannot say we love God and hate one of His children (1 John 4:19–21). Because God *is* love, those who know God will love others. If you do not love others, you do not really know God (1 John 4:16–18). It really is that simple. The law of God is love and the love of God is an others-focused



love, a love defined by self-sacrifice (Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10). Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8–10).

When we love our neighbors, it shows our love for God. When Peter told Jesus he loved Him, Jesus responded, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:15–19). When Jesus told the parable of the sheep and the goats, He said, “As you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:31–46). How we respond to our neighbor is directly connected to how we walk with God. As Bible scholar Darrell Bock wrote, “Ethics is not an abstract question of options in a particular situation; it is a matter of character developed through a walk with God and a focus on Jesus.”ⁱⁱⁱ If we really love God, we will share His heart for His people. Like the lawyer, many of us know all the right biblical answers. The question is, are we *living out* the law of love?

Q: Describe a time when someone loved you the way God loves you. How did that person treat you? What difference did it make in your life?

Q: If we loved others that way, how would it show the world who Jesus is?

Q: Think about one or two people in your life who need to know Jesus. How can you show this kind of self-sacrificing love for them this week?

Luke 10:29–35 [Read]

Talking Point #2: Loving my neighbor tangibly displays God’s love for people.

Q: Why do you think the lawyer felt the need to justify himself?

Q: Why would it have been surprising to this audience to see the Samaritan as the hero of the story?

The lawyer was looking to justify himself, to prove to Jesus that he *had* loved his neighbor, that he was worthy of eternal life (v. 29). In Hebrew thought, a neighbor was a fellow Israelite. In the ancient world, as with many around the world today, there was often a strong sense of division between “my people,” those to whom I have a responsibility, and everybody else. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, human love typically says to “love your neighbor, and hate your enemy” (Matthew 5:43). Jesus’s disciples were no different in their attitude toward Samaritans. In just the previous chapter, the disciples had asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans (Luke 9:51–55). But in both the Sermon on the Mount and in this parable, Jesus blew that belief completely apart. It may be the human attitude, but it’s not the attitude of God or His disciples.

Jesus’ response was not a gentle one. His goal was to *demolish* the lawyer’s question.



The lawyer was asking “who is my neighbor” in an attempt to create boundaries, to limit who he “had to” show love to in order to obtain eternal life^{iv}. Again, like the student wanting to know the minimum to pass, his heart attitude was showing. Maybe if he kept the definition of *neighbor* narrow enough, he could justify himself, prove he deserved eternal life. But people who truly love God don’t ask who they “have to” love. They love everyone.

Jesus chose an interesting way to make His point. He intentionally chose the greatest enemy of the Jews – a Samaritan – as the key figure in His parable. But instead of the Samaritan’s being the one who was attacked and in need of help and asking the lawyer whether or not he should show him love, in Jesus’ story the Samaritan the person is the one who showed God’s love, who *was* the good neighbor. Jesus flipped the question around. Instead of asking, “Who is my neighbor?” (i.e., Whom do I have to show love to?), Jesus asked, “Who was the neighbor?” (What does it mean to show God’s love to a neighbor?).

The lawyer was asking the wrong question. The question we should be asking ourselves isn’t who our neighbor is. Everyone in the world is your neighbor. The question is, what does it look like to *be* a good neighbor? We shouldn’t ask, “Whom do I *have to* be loving toward” but “How can I show God’s love to everyone, every day, in every way?” Just as He did in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said if you want to be like God, you have to love those who love you *and* those who hate you – your tribe *and* your enemies (Matthew 5:43–48).^v

The people who were supposed to be God’s representatives here on earth, a priest and a Levite, did *not* show the love of God to the man who had been beaten and abused. But the Samaritan, whom the lawyer wouldn’t have considered a real follower of God because he was half-Gentile, loved the man the way that God would have. Scholars believe that the priest and the Levite both had “good” religious reasons for not stopping to help: (1) They were on their way to the temple to do the “real work” of serving God and (2) to touch a beaten body would have made them ritually unclean. The lawyer may well have expected them to avoid the uncleanness of the man or excused them for these religious reasons, but Jesus didn’t.^{vi}

Jesus’ point was clear. Following God’s law – what you “need to do to obtain eternal life” – is not about observing religious ritual or cleanliness or piety. It is about loving people. Not just *saying* you love people, but showing love in action. In this way, the parable is a beautiful depiction of the lovingkindness of God toward mankind, who are beaten and broken and in need of mercy. The parable never mentions the ethnicity – or any other background information, for that matter – of the man in need. He was simply “a man,” symbolic of every man or woman who has ever lived. We are like this poor distressed traveler. Sin has robbed us, beaten us down,



and left us for dead. But Jesus has compassion on us, no matter who we are, where we are from, or what we have done. When we help those in need, whether it's a physical, emotional, spiritual or any other kind of need, we are tangibly showing God's love for the world.^{vii}

Our God is the God who sees those the world considers invisible (Genesis 16:13). The God who reaches out to the marginalized, the poor, the dishonorable, the sinner, the outcast and those in need. Jesus didn't worry about whether the leper or the bleeding woman were ritually unclean when He touched them to heal them. *He made them clean.* Jesus didn't worry about the legalistic rules of the Sabbath. He healed people no matter what day it was, because the Sabbath was made for man as a picture of the eternal wholeness and rest we will have in heaven. When we reach out to our neighbors in love, no matter who they are or where they are coming from, even the very least and the last, we show the love of God for the world (Matthew 25:31–46). The lawyer was trying to create limits for who he would love, but God places no limits on His love. God loves the *entire* world and does not desire that anyone should perish (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). No one is outside of the love of God.

Q: If we focused primarily on loving our neighbor rather than religious ritual or piety, what kind of image of who God is would that present to the world?

Q: Think about neighbors in your area who are outcast, marginalized, or hurting and broken. How can you reach out to them with the love of Christ this week?

Q: Imagine a person who has never been truly loved, never known the love of God or another person who truly loved them selflessly and unconditionally. What kind of difference would it make in his or her life for *you* to reach out in love?

Luke 10:36–37 [Read]

Talking Point #3: My neighbor is anyone who has a need.

Q: How would Jesus' flipping the question have made the lawyer think in a new way?

Q: Why did Jesus ask in such a way that the lawyer could deduce the theological point himself?

Jesus used a style of ancient rhetoric that asked probing questions to lead students to discover the truth for themselves rather than just telling them the truth.^{viii} In the case of this parable, it was totally obvious who the neighbor to the man in need was. There could be no denying it. But notice that the lawyer didn't answer with "the Samaritan." He didn't comment on the identity of the man who acted like a neighbor



or those who didn't. He simply said, "The one who showed him mercy." That doesn't mean he didn't get the point, just that he didn't want to call attention to the fact that the one who did the right thing was a Samaritan.^{ix}

The story took place on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, a 17-mile journey that was very rocky and lined with caves that made good hideouts for robbers and bandits. It was notoriously dangerous, so this scenario would have been pretty common.^x Whether to help or to walk by may have been a regular choice for someone such as this lawyer. Jews were required by the law to offer *zedakah* (justice/charity) to those in need. Isaiah said that Israel would be redeemed by their acts of *zedakah* (Isaiah 1:27). The prophets and Proverbs tell us acts of *zedakah* are more acceptable to God than sacrifices (Proverbs 21:3). This doesn't just mean giving money but also personally helping those who need it in any way you can. The law also requires that *zedakah* be done generously, not with a begrudging heart (Deuteronomy 15:10). This was what Jesus was most concerned about, the attitude of our hearts.

This was also one of the things Jesus criticized the religious leaders for missing. They followed the tithing laws so carefully that they divided a tenth of their spices to give, but they completely missed the "more important matters" of the law, the *zedakah* (Matthew 23:23–24). They followed the letter of the law, but their hearts were far from God. The Samaritan fulfilled all aspects of the *zedakah* – financial giving, physical help, and most importantly, a heart of compassion (v. 33).

The parable moves relatively quickly through the story, with few details until it gets to all that the Samaritan did for the man.^{xi} First, he was moved with compassion. This Greek word, *spagchnizomi*, is the same one used when Jesus was moved with compassion for those who were sick, those who were grieving the death of Lazarus, and the people of Jerusalem who had been abused by their religious leaders. It means to be moved to the inward parts, to the deepest part of your soul. The Samaritan shared God's love and compassion for this man. No matter what his background was, this man loved the way Jesus loved, which is what Jesus said it means to be a disciple.

The Samaritan physically cared for the man. First, he approached him, in direct contrast to the priest and the Levite passing by on the other side. He didn't worry about ritual purity or what would be considered proper behavior. He wasn't too busy doing more important things. Even though he clearly had somewhere to go, even though it was an interruption in his schedule, he took the time to stop and help the man.

He didn't just go get help, he personally bound up the man's wounds and anointed



him with oil and wine. This would have not only been for medical reasons; anointing is also a religious act of setting someone apart for service to God.^{xii} He laid him on his own animal and brought him to an inn, paying for his stay. The amount he gave the innkeeper would have covered a stay of about three and a half weeks, time to fully recover.^{xiii} Plus he promised to repay whatever else the innkeeper might spend to care for him. This a beautiful picture of true selfless love in action.^{xiv}

The only character in the story of whom Jesus didn't mention any identifying details is the man who was in need. He didn't say whether he was Jew or Gentile, poor or rich, religious leader or sinner. He was just "a man," representative of *all* people. Our neighbor is everyman. It doesn't matter *who* the person in need is. Believers are called to show tangible love in action, with a heart of compassion like Jesus, to anyone and everyone who is in need.

Q: Why is it hard for us to want to help some people sometimes? Give specific examples of the kinds of people it might be hard to love or help and why.

Q: Why does it show God's grace *even more* when we help someone who is different from us? Who may be construed as an enemy? Or someone the world may think doesn't "deserve" it?

Q: How would your life be different if you actually stopped to help everyone in need you encountered every day?



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WEEK 1



TOOK

Main Point: Loving my neighbor is a demonstration of my love for God.

The 2018 documentary *Won't You Be My Neighbor* and the 2019 film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* were released to critical acclaim as they explored the life and legacy of Fred Rogers.^{xv xvi} Fred Rogers passed away in 2003, and the positive influence he had on his viewers, as well as the impact from his neighborly demeanor, will extend well beyond his life.^{xvii} Like Fred Rogers, we are to view the people we come in contact with as our neighbors. But even more, we are to meet, serve, and share our faith with the prayerful hope that each of our neighbors will come to faith in Jesus.

Q: Have you ever had a neighbor like Fred Rogers? What made that person so unique?

Q: How does viewing everyone as your neighbor affect the way you interact with others? How does it affect your prayer life?

THINK: What does it mean to think of *every person in the world* as your neighbor, one of God's image bearers? How does that affect the way you see the world and people from other nations? How does it affect your sense of obligation to love your neighbor? Especially those who are different from you, those who frustrate you, those you don't naturally like, those who are on the "other side" from you in some way?

PRAY: For the heart of Jesus for all people all over the world. That you would see those who are in need all around you and have compassion on them. To not be too busy or too concerned about religious propriety or worried about whether they "deserve" it. Pray that God would give you His eyes to see the great need in the world and His heart to love everyone. (Please see the prayer guide for help.)



ACT: Stop and help. As you go through your days this week, every time you see someone in need, stop and help. Even if you're in a hurry, even if you think they might not deserve it, even if you're worried about the propriety of the situation, stop and help in whatever way you can. See how God uses your willingness to serve and your heart to love.



- ⁱDarrell L. Bock, *Luke, IVP New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- ⁱⁱDonald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28, Word Biblical Commentary 33B* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995).
- ⁱⁱⁱDarrell L. Bock, *Luke, IVP New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- ^{iv}Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).
- ^vN. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2001).
- ^{vi}Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, IVP New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- ^{vii}Matthew Henry and Martin H. Manser, *The New Matthew Henry Commentary* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2010).
- ^{viii}Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).
- ^{ix}Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, IVP New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- ^xJohn Wilkinson, "The Way from Jerusalem to Jericho," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 38/1 (Mar 1975), 10–24.
- ^{xi}Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, IVP New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- ^{xii}Marty E. Stevens, *Leadership Roles in the Old Testament: King, Prophet, Priest, and Sage* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).
- ^{xiii}Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, IVP New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
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