

# Who Is My Neighbor?

A discussion-based lesson plan based on Luke 10:25-37

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## Objectives:

- A. To create a setting in which God's Spirit can speak to us through this Biblical story, and to share a commitment to openness, spiritual growth, and fellowship.
- B. To learn from this passage, from the voices of its characters, and from one another's perspectives on what it is Jesus is teaching about neighbors.
- C. To recognize that prejudice is widespread among human beings and cultures, and can be based on many different factors and characteristics—more pervasively and varied than we may realize.
- D. To challenge ourselves to take a fresh look at prejudices: those that existed in the Holy Land in the first century, prejudices that exist today, in the United States and around the world, and prejudices that may exist closer to home (community, church, our own hearts & minds)
- E. To consider what we believe God thinks about prejudice, and how our desire to follow God's will might guide us as we confront prejudices: our own, and those of others.

## Assumptions & Understandings:

- A. This lesson plan is written for use by adults, although it could be used with youth, teens, or adolescents.
- B. This lesson plan is written for in-person gathering, but is adaptable for zoom or other online format
- C. This lesson plan is based on Luke 10:25-37, although the facilitator or group members should feel free to bring other scriptural passages into the discussion.
- D. This lesson plan will most likely be used with a church-based small group or class, though it could be utilized in other contexts.
- E. The author of this lesson plan anticipates it will require a single session of 60-75 minutes, although a second session to review and process responses is also an option.
- F. The author is a Congregational minister, writing with respect for theological diversity in mind. To this point, the author does not hold to the doctrines of scriptural inerrancy or infallibility, instead seeing scripture as a living document, and a key resource for spiritual growth & guidance.

## Supplies:

- A. Bible(s)
  1. The facilitator should have a Bible, as well as providing scripture sheets and writing implements for the class (or, if online, provide slides with relevant passages).
  2. The use of several translations that give different perspectives is encouraged (for example, NRSV along with The Message and possibly KJV).
- B. Newsprint, whiteboard, or slides
  1. Participants will be responding in preparation for a re-reading of the text in modern context; either listing the new characters on newsprint or white board or on a shared screen will be helpful as they move through the lesson.
  2. The leader will want to make notes as people respond, to help them as they process information.

## **Opening:**

- A. Welcome, share names, and include some kind of icebreaker (asking for favorite pizza toppings, favorite movie, one thing people don't know about me, etc.). Keep this short, but let it emphasize how different people like different things.
- B. Describe the Objectives, above, by reading or paraphrasing them.
- C. Name the terms of discussion (listen respectfully, respect different thoughts and beliefs, take turns, raise hands, and consider use of Talking Stick or other device for limiting interruption or domination of conversation, and encouraging even non-talkers to participate. The Talking Stick is passed around the group, and each person can speak only when holding it; all others should listen. If someone has a response, when the stick has made the rounds, it can be passed again.)

## **Say the Lord's Prayer Together.**

### **Introduction**

- A. Ask: "Who is your neighbor? What do they look like? What do they do?"  
Take all answers; leader writes them down.
- B. Ask: "What makes someone your neighbor?"
- C. Ask: "Now, who is NOT your neighbor?" They may need some prompting, and encouragement that they will not be judged for their answer. Areas to help them explore might be to name those who are different racially, religiously, politically, etc. No shaming or reactions—we are just getting the responses down here.

### **The Bible Story**

Ask, who knows the story of the Good Samaritan? Have participants describe it, recapping the story as they remember it—before looking at the scripture (don't hand out scripture sheets until after this point).

Before reading it, ask the class what is the main point of this parable that Jesus told? (Let them work through it: everyone is our neighbor, and it's by our behavior that we show that commitment.)

### Leader Shares:

For Jesus, the theme of neighbor love is at the heart of the Law—so let's dig in here to see what more we can mine out of this story and see how it compares to our story.

Before we start reading: It's important, coming to scripture, to keep in mind the context of the story. If you saw a car crash after it happened, would you really know who was at fault or what caused it? In the same way, we need to have some context for Bible stories to understand what they meant to the people who wrote them down and who heard them first.

### Context of the Story:

You could print this out on cards and have class members read them, or the leader can read them. Might be nice to have different voices sharing.

1. First Century Palestine: a province of the Roman Empire. The Jews of that region were allowed to practice their faith but watched very closely for signs of revolt against the empire. They were very committed to maintaining their distinctive culture and had many practices that were legalistic and had more to do with categories of who was in and who was out, including ritual cleanliness, educational status, and city (Jerusalem especially) vs. countryside.

2. In the region, then, were Latin speaking Romans, and kept very separated from them, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic speaking natives of the region. These included not only the Jews, but also the Samaritans.
3. These two peoples had many things in common: original ethnicity, language, and some spiritual practices, but from the time of the Return from the Exile as described in the Hebrew Bible books of Ezra & Nehemiah, they were profoundly focused on their differences and had NOTHING to do with each other if they could help it.

Read the Story:

Luke 10:25-37 (This is NRSV translation.) Again, leader can read it, or have several volunteers read.

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii,<sup>[b]</sup> gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

ASK:

- A. What do we see here?
- B. What part of the story is live action and what part is a parable, a teaching story, that Jesus is telling?
- C. What is Jesus' main point? (See verses 36-37 for this answer.)
- D. Who should have been the good guy? Who was the good guy?

LEADER:

Let's clarify a few things in this telling:

- A. The Lawyer was a man (always a man, in that culture) schooled in Jewish Law (Torah) and practices.
  1. Why do you think he asked Jesus his question?
  2. Do you think he knew the answer he was looking for?
  3. Was he trying to test Jesus?
- B. What is written in the Law: This Great Commandment is found in different versions in Deuteronomy 6:4, and Leviticus 19:18, and thus a foundation of the Jewish faith that both the Lawyer AND JESUS practiced.
- C. Priest: the highest religious leadership among the Jews, deeply schooled in the Law

- D. Levite: the lay—that is, non-ordained—associate of the priest, both men (again, always men in that time, place, and culture) deeply familiar with all the practices and rituals, including sacrifice, and the requirement to keep one’s self ritually “clean”—by rigorously following all the laws of purity and ritual cleanliness.
- E. Share: it’s easy for us to judge the lawyer, the priest, and the Levite for maintaining standards of law over compassion. But they were products of their times just as we are products of ours.

**LOOK BACK AT LIST OF NEIGHBORS AND NON-NEIGHBORS:**

Let’s pick two neighbors and one non-neighbor and go back to this story. (This is when it’s helpful to have the list from the exercise at the start!) Go with the most dramatic non-neighbor (for example, a terrorist—you want this contrast to be kind of shocking.)

LEADER, REREAD THE STORY AGAIN, inserting the chosen neighbors for the priest and Levite, and the chosen non-neighbor.

**ASK:**

- A. Was this squirmy or uncomfortable for you to hear?
- B. What was shocking—to hear that someone you don’t relate to was the hero? To hear that the ones who should care, didn’t seem to? In the original telling—both the story time and for the original audience hearing Luke’s gospel, the Samaritan being the hero would produce a gasp. What motivates that gasp?
- C. Why do you think Jesus told this whole story instead of just saying “anyone who shows mercy or needs mercy is your neighbor?”
- D. What is hard about the commandment in the conclusion: “Go and do likewise?”
- E. Where are times when you might find your comfort zone challenged in helping someone?
- F. When are times when someone might refuse or suspect your help based on their categories of neighbor? (We don’t know if the poor unconscious victim of this story, who is assumed to be a Jew, would have wanted the Samaritan to even touch him if he knew.)
- G. How can we go and do likewise?
- H. How can we get out of our categories, our prejudices (meaning, our pre-judgements) of people? Take answers and write them down—maybe share with the class as a follow up email.

**SUGGEST:**

- A. Take this story with you.
- B. Invite your family, friends, to name their neighbors and non-neighbors and then tell the story with those characters inserted, and with the conclusion that it was the one who was a perceived enemy who turned out to be the true neighbor.

READ: The Great Commandment (v. 27). We’re going to pray in a moment. Based on this commandment and this story, what should we pray for? (Take answers, write down.)

**Closing Prayer:**

This is meant to be a simple prayer and can be phrased in your own words or use the ones below:

O God, you love all your children, and your love, given to us no matter who we are or how you are, seeks us out and transforms us as we go about our daily lives. We have read and thought about one of Jesus’ important teachings today. When we think about the Good Samaritan, it raises questions and

ideas and prayers in our hearts and minds. (Leader then summarizes the prayer suggestions from the class.)

God, you have come among us to show us the way. It is not always easy. Sometimes we think we are obeying you just like the priest and the Levite in this story when we are actually ignoring your teaching about compassion and love of neighbor. As we leave this class, help us to carry our questions about who really is our neighbor into our daily lives, and give us courage to act with grace, reconciliation, and compassion, even when it's hard to do so. We thank you for the life and teaching of Jesus, and for the prompting of your Holy Spirit, as you guide us into all your holy ways. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.