

JULY 3, 2022

SERIES 1: LOVING THE UNLOVED

1.4

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will love my neighbor.

FOCUS VERSES

Luke 10:36-37

³⁶ Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

³⁷ And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

LESSON TEXT

Leviticus 19:18;
Matthew 22:34-40;
Luke 10:25-37;
Galatians 5:13-15

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Bible Reading Plan, the Lesson Text, and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

LESSON CONNECTION I

I remember sitting in my first freshman class meeting at Bible college. I looked around at the people I would get to know over the course of the next four years. They were a diverse group of young men and women from all over the world.

One young man had a natural singing ability that gained him immediate attention, and his vibrant and excited personality seemed to attract everyone. In addition, there was a certain young lady in the room we immediately knew was going to be popular. Her last name meant she already came with a reputation, and being in her circle could lead to a lot of adventures and networking connections down the road. Scouring the room, I saw another young man I wished I could be more like. He could do everything; he could preach, could play multiple instruments, and was more athletic than any of the other freshmen. I sat in the back of the freshman class meeting and purposed that these were the people I wanted to be around on a regular basis.

I regret to admit that much of my first semester was spent trying to impress people like the good singer, the young lady with the recognizable last name, and the athletic guy. But near the end of the semester, I received a disturbing wake-up call. The Dean of Students stood up in chapel and mournfully announced that a certain young man, one of my fellow freshmen, was dropping out of school and going back home. My mind was immediately filled with questions. This guy was in all my classes. We sat next to each other at times and even shared notes on occasion. But the more I thought about it, I shamefully realized I had not seen him in a couple weeks and had not even noticed.

It was slowly revealed through quiet conversations that he had fallen into a deep, clinical depression and had chosen to lock himself in his dorm room. He had survived on snacks and old food in his mini fridge for almost a month. He had not been attending classes or chapel, turning in assignments, or responding to emails from professors. It wasn't until a concerned professor took it upon himself to go to the young man's dorm room that his secret was discovered.

While this story is truly tragic, what is even more frustrating is that in a dorm full of young Bible college students, including myself, we were completely oblivious to our fellow student in need. For weeks this young man hid in his room with a crippling mental illness and no one bothered to knock on his door and see how he was doing.

I write this true story with conviction. I had spent so much of my time trying to impress my good-looking, popular neighbors, that I completely overlooked one of my neighbors who desperately needed a loving friend. This memory serves as a constant reminder to me to be on the lookout for my neighbors in need of godly love, caring friendships, and emotional support.

Teacher Option:
Show Image to help illustrate the Lesson Connection.



SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: Do you have a neighbor you hope you never run into? Explain.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection on page 379. **I**

- I. WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?
 - » *Why is it impossible to love God without loving your neighbor? Why is it impossible to love your neighbor without loving God?*
 - A. The Lawyer Tried to Test Jesus
 - B. The First and Second Commandments
 - » *Think about the fact that all people, even the worst sinners, are made in God's image. How does this change your perspective and approach to loving your neighbor?*
 - C. The Lawyer Tried to Justify Himself
 - D. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

- II. GOD REQUIRES US TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES
 - » *How much do we love ourselves? If we were to truly love others as much as we love ourselves, what might this relationship look like?*
 - A. I Do Not Choose My Neighbor
 - » *Toward whom do you find it most difficult to practice this commandment to "love thy neighbour"? What people or groups are the most difficult for you? How could you pray and what actions could you take to be more compassionate?*
 - B. The Law Is Fulfilled in This Command
 - C. I Will Love My Neighbor
 - » *How can you purpose to intentionally love your neighbor this week? **V***



Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- Our lost or unsaved neighbors
- That we would be moved to share the love of Jesus with our neighbors

LESSON COMMENTARY

I. WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

One of the primary reasons many have difficulty following the commandment of Jesus to “love thy neighbour as thyself” is because of a modern misunderstanding of who one’s neighbor is. The modern concept typically entails a person with whom you live in close proximity—you have houses on the same street, you share an apartment building, or the person’s residence is within walking distance from yours.

As the story in the Lesson Connection demonstrated, many times we try to pick and choose our neighbors from among the people we like, those with whom we share commonalities, or those who can benefit us in some regard. But through a careful study of Jesus’ teaching, we will discover there is a difference between who we would like our neighbors to be and who Jesus says our neighbors are. Ultimately, if we do not understand who Jesus considers to be our neighbors, we might fail to accurately follow the second greatest commandment. It could also be argued that we cannot completely fulfill the first greatest commandment, which is to love God with everything we have, until we learn how to accurately fulfill the second greatest commandment as well.

A. The Lawyer Tried to Test Jesus

As our lesson text shows, in multiple instances lawyers tried to test Jesus. In the instance in Matthew 22, multiple individuals had been grilling Jesus about specifics concerning the Old Testament law. The previous section where the Sadducees asked Jesus questions about the resurrection demonstrated the atmosphere and the mood on that particular day. The religious elites were out to trap Jesus and thought they could trick Him by asking pointed questions about the Torah.

The lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest, or most important, law was in Moses’ writings. From a legal perspective, the question undoubtedly contained an aspect of precedent and hierarchy of the laws. In other words, whatever law was deemed the greatest must be the law to which all other laws must defer. But Jesus could not be fooled. He knew the Law better than even the lawyers did; after all, He was there when the Law was written. Jesus knew the original intent of every single commandment in the Torah, and He was ready with an answer.

B. The First and Second Commandments

Jesus responded to the lawyer, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew

Why is it impossible to love God without loving your neighbor? Why is it impossible to love your neighbor without loving God?

22:37–40). In this brief answer, Jesus gave a synopsis of how to obey the Torah.

The first law comes from a passage commonly known as the *Shema*, the beginning of which states, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). Some may consider the first commandment to be the simpler of the two to follow. However, it is impossible to perform the first commandment accurately without fulfilling the second, of which Leviticus 19:18 tells us, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.”

The basis upon which the children of Israel were to treat their neighbors was rooted in God’s personhood and presence. If they truly believed God was who He said He was and each person was made in God’s image, then they would treat each other accordingly.

Think about the fact that all people, even the worst sinners, are made in God’s image. How does this change your perspective and approach to loving your neighbor?

C. The Lawyer Tried to Justify Himself

In the passage from Luke, another lawyer tried to test Jesus by asking how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus answered as He did in Matthew 22, by reciting the two greatest commandments: love God and love your neighbor. However, this answer was not specific enough for the lawyer, who pressed Jesus further by asking, “And who is my neighbour?” Luke records that the lawyer asked this question in an attempt to “justify himself” (Luke 10:29). If the lawyer could determine specifically who was and was not his neighbor, then he would have justification from Jesus Himself for not loving some people.

Sadly, this is the way many people approach this question today. Instead of seeing everyone as a neighbor and loving everyone as much as we love ourselves, we like to pick and choose who our neighbors are. This can stem from a desire, either conscious or subconscious, to avoid having to be neighbors to people who are different from us. Many today are still desirous of an answer to the lawyer’s question, asking, “If I am commanded to love my neighbor as myself, then who is my neighbor?” Fortunately, Jesus was ready with a story to answer this question.

D. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Jesus told a story of about a Samaritan, but not just any Samaritan—a good Samaritan. This was quite appalling to the Jews listening to the story because they hated the Samaritans. Neither got along with the other. However, even though they avoided each other, they were still neighbors—whether they liked it or not.

As Jesus told this story of a man suffering on the side of road and needing assistance, the audience expected a character like the priest or the Levite to be the hero of the story. But when Jesus

announced that it was the Samaritan who cared for the man, the audience was shocked. And not only did the Samaritan care for the wounded man, but he went above and beyond the call of duty by binding up the man's wounds using his own equipment, providing the man transportation to a safe place, and paying for his lodging and further medical care. At the end of the story, when Jesus asked the lawyer who acted like a neighbor to the wounded man, the lawyer begrudgingly replied, "He that shewed mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). The lawyer could not even bring himself to say, "The Samaritan acted like a neighbor." The story was quite an indictment upon the Jewish priest and Levite in the story. The fact that a Samaritan, with whom the Jews had a long-standing dissention, was the only honorable man in the story left the lawyer and all others listening without excuse.

II. GOD REQUIRES US TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES

Jesus concluded the story of the Good Samaritan with a command: "Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37). Jesus' command still resonates today. The command to treat our neighbors with love and compassion in the same way the Samaritan treated the wounded Jewish man is still relevant; these two basic guidelines for Christian living have not changed.

However, the second greatest commandment carries with it a qualifier. Not only are we commanded to love our neighbors, but to the same degree we love our own selves. This is probably one of the most challenging aspects of this entire commandment. Most of us have no trouble treating ourselves to nice things, eating delicious food, wearing fancy clothes, playing with expensive toys, and making time for ourselves to enjoy all the pleasures we desire. We spoil ourselves, but we often scrimp in terms of loving others.

However, this is exactly the way God calls us to love others. I cannot just love my neighbor at arm's length; I must be willing to treat my neighbor at least as well as I treat myself. This measuring stick is a good evaluator of how well we are fulfilling this commandment. Even if it is somewhat true that we are loving our neighbors, are we loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves?

A. I Do Not Choose My Neighbor

At the end of the day, we do not get to choose our neighbors as much as we might wish we could. A quick study of the original language makes this abundantly clear. The word *neighbor* comes from the Greek *pleôsis*, which is translated near when used as an adverb and *neighbor* when used as a noun; it is always used to refer to someone who is close by (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3). Therefore, anyone who is within relatively close proximity to us is considered a neighbor. This includes the house on the block

How much do we love ourselves? If we were to truly love others as much as we love ourselves, what might this relationship look like?

that plays loud music, the coworker whose incessant profanity is a constant annoyance, and the homeless man on the corner waving his sign at us on our daily work commute. Like it or not, all these individuals are our neighbors.

If I do not have the luxury of choosing who my neighbor is, then it puts a lot more emphasis on how I treat the people who are already in my life, even the ones I may not like. My neighbors might even be people who have hurt me in the past. If they are within my sphere of influence, then I must show love and mercy toward them.

Toward whom do you find it most difficult to practice this commandment to “love thy neighbour”? What people or groups are the most difficult for you? How could you pray and what actions could you take to be more compassionate?

B. The Law Is Fulfilled in This Command

The apostle Paul also referenced the second greatest commandment on more than one occasion. In Galatians 5:14 Paul mused, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Paul said *all* the Law; this includes all five books written by Moses—from Genesis to Deuteronomy. In other words, instead of trying to painstakingly read, remember, and obey all the fine details written in the Torah, one could simply follow this guiding principle and fulfill all those laws efficiently.

C. I Will Love My Neighbor

At the end of the day, choosing to love God is a choice, but many Christians already know that. However, choosing to love one’s neighbor is also a choice. Sometimes this is a more difficult choice to make than the first, but as we have discovered, it is impossible to love God completely or correctly without also loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves.

Just like learning to love God is a process, so learning to love others can also be a process, especially when God has called us to love people who have hurt us and actively do not love us in return. It is especially difficult to love those who have abused us—physically, spiritually, or otherwise. It is extremely difficult to love the murderer, the rapist, or the terrorist. However, the Bible contains examples of God loving and saving murderers, rapists, and terrorists. Furthermore, He often used simple humans like you and me to communicate that love. Thank God for people who were diligent to follow God’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

How can you purpose to intentionally love your neighbor this week? ▼

Teacher Option:

Show Video to either take the place of the question or to help illustrate it.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

(Johnnie Peyton tells the following story.)

Patrick was not much to look at the first time I met him. He was small and awkward and preferred computers to human interaction. He was the “black sheep” of his family, suffered from addiction, and struggled to keep a job. He was not the type of person I wanted to go out of my way to pick up for church on Sunday mornings. In fact, I didn’t really want to hang out with him at all. On more than one occasion, I inwardly fumed when he made me late for church, called me late at night to pick him up from work, or was running low on cash and asked me to buy him a burger.

However, the story of the young man in the Lesson Connection rang in my ears throughout my time with Patrick. I certainly did not want to make that mistake again. So I endured. Eventually Patrick got a steady job and a reliable vehicle. Then he started playing an instrument at church. Shortly before the time of this writing, I saw Patrick leading service and encouraging his church from the pulpit. When I saw the clip online, I was immediately humbled and felt guilty for all the times I got frustrated in the process of loving my neighbor. I thanked God for the time I spent loving Patrick, even when he made it difficult. Through the love that I and others showed Patrick, God was able to mold him into a minister. While we could only see what Patrick was, God saw what Patrick could be.

Many times we do not get to see the ultimate fruit of loving our neighbors. Sometimes we love our neighbors and they outright reject us and reject Christ, never to darken the doors of the church again. We should not be discouraged. Even Jesus loved, taught, and fed people who would ultimately turn away from Him and never return. (See John 6:66.) However, if we can learn to love our neighbors like Jesus commanded us, we will see benefits above and beyond what we could ever imagine.

