

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

August 23-29, 2020

Sermon Series: Who is My Neighbor?

Week One: "The Guy Next Door"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Almighty God, as You have sent Jesus to be for us light and truth, send now Your spirit upon us to grant us grace and strength to follow in His footsteps this day. Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Jesus' response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" is to tell the story of the much unliked foreigners from Samaria. We will look at this story as the backdrop for a series about loving our neighbor in real and certain ways.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

Sometimes the hardest neighbor to love is the guy next door. He doesn't cut his lawn right, makes noise late at night, and his son revs his engine all the time. But Jesus calls us to love even those we are most familiar with. How can we love those who really aren't that likeable?

Sunday Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37 (A group member should read the passages aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

With what question does the legal expert attempt to trap Jesus? (10:25)

Which commandments does the legal expert think give an answer to his question? (10:27)

Does Jesus agree with the legal expert? (10:28)

What issue of interpretation of the commandment does the legal expert want guidance on? (10:29)

What happened to the man on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho in Jesus' parable? (10:30)

What did the priest and the Levite do when they came upon this man? (10:31-32)

Who came along next in the parable, and how did he respond? (10:33-35)

What question does Jesus pose to the legal expert concerning the story? (10:36)

What answer does the legal expert give? (10:37)

What does Jesus tell the legal expert to do, and how do you think this answers the legal expert's original questions in verses 25 and 29? (10:37)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.

We might wonder why it says the man's question to Jesus was meant to "test" Him – what was he trying to figure out?

Similarly, we might wonder what Jesus was trying to figure out by throwing the question back at the man.

We might wonder what Jesus' answer implies about His appraisal of the man.

We probably wonder why the man pushed Jesus after getting the answer he wanted, and what kind of an answer he expected Jesus to give to his question, "who is my neighbor?"

We might also wonder why Jesus decided the best way to answer the question was with a parable.

We might wonder if there is significance in the story about the two towns of Jerusalem and Jericho, or if it could have happened on any road.

We could certainly ask whether such assaults were common in ancient Israel.

We might wonder about the specific roles and social status of priests and Levites.

We probably wonder about why the identification of the last passer-by as a Samaritan is important.

We probably wonder just how normal, or extravagant, the Samaritan's behavior was in the ancient world, even for people of the same ethnic group.

Finally, we might wonder if Jesus' final command is meant to answer the question about "who is my neighbor," or "how do I gain eternal life," ... or both?

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: Luke 10:21-24; Luke 7:30; Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; Luke 9:51-53

The story of the Good Samaritan is one of those parables that is well known even outside of Christian faith. To begin, then, we want to take a look at the context of the parable – how it fits into the narrative that Luke has set down. Notice first, that in the verses just before today’s passage, in Luke 10:21-24, Jesus has just spoken to 72 of His followers, who have just returned from going out in ministry, and He has concluded with a blessing over them. But immediately after this, Jesus is confronted by a lawyer with a question about eternal life. All the successes of the 72 who were sent out are irrelevant to this man. The text says the lawyer asked his question “to test Jesus,” and we can see from the context established in Luke 7:30 that the “lawyers” were, as a group, antagonistic toward Jesus, because they “reject God’s will.” Knowing this helps us to see that this is not just an innocent question, but a veiled attack. If we think about the deepest religious questions, in any age, “How do we gain eternal life” is a likely candidate for debate. The lawyer wants to see if Jesus “passes muster” in His response – it is, indeed, a test, or perhaps even a trap. Getting a definitive answer from Jesus on a debated ethical issue could provide the evidence needed to charge a teacher with blasphemy.

Readers of the Gospels may be more familiar with the passages in Matthew and Mark where Jesus is specifically asked by a lawyer, “what is the greatest commandment” (see Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34). There, Jesus quotes the commandment first, to love God (from Deuteronomy 6:4-5), and second, to love neighbor (from Leviticus 19:18). Luke’s version of this is distinctive on two counts. First, the two commandments are combined into a single, unified, command to “love God and neighbor,” without the implication of subordinating the command to love neighbor as “second” to the command to love God, as in Matthew and Mark. Secondly, the tables are turned in Luke – it is not Jesus who answers a question, with the lawyer affirming his answer, it is the lawyer who asks a question, and Jesus affirms HIS answer. Uniquely in Luke, Jesus commands the lawyer, “Do this and you will live.” If the lawyer will love God and love neighbor, he will gain eternal life. But, because his intent was to trap Jesus, the lawyer pushes deeper – well, just WHO is my neighbor? Again, Jesus’ answer has the potential to incriminate Him. Many of the Essenes, the Jewish sectarians who had separated themselves from mainstream Judaism, drew a strong distinction between their brothers, the “sons of light,” who they were to love, and everyone else, who they were to hate. Was Jesus like the Essenes? But even in mainstream Judaism, the Pharisees had strict rules around interaction with non-Jews. Would Jesus uphold mainstream Judaism in His response?

Well, instead of giving a straightforward answer, Jesus tells the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan, which ends up being a better answer than simple words could possibly provide. But we need to see that the parable is intended to provoke. It is blunt, not sentimental. A traveler has been stripped, beaten, and left for dead. That is bad enough, but to any listener in Jesus’ day, the contention that Jewish leaders, esteemed by the people for their dedication to holiness before God, would actively avoid the situation by crossing to the other side of the road, would have been shocking. Even if they did so for reasons of personal safety, or out of a concern for ritual purity (if the body was a corpse, it would defile them to approach it), to pass by on the other side of the road would be unconscionable. In fact, if we look at Leviticus 19:18 in its entirety, it is clear that for ancient Israel, “neighbor” meant, at a bare minimum, a fellow Israelite! (“You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD”) And yet, in the parable, this priest and this Levite can’t be bothered. Of course, the major provoking shock in the entire story is that the third man to approach is a despised Samaritan, an enemy of the fallen man, not one of his religious leaders! This is a man, a foreigner, who is himself likely at risk on this desert road between Jerusalem and

Jericho. And yet it is this man, who is already vulnerable in this territory, who takes the chance of stopping, putting the man on his animal, and taking him to an inn. The hero of the story is the hated Samaritan enemy. Within the context of Luke's Gospel, the force of this within the context of the narrative is even greater in light of the Samaritan hostility to Jesus' ministry that Luke described in Luke 9:51-53!

But perhaps what is most stunning about the story is how Jesus has used it to answer the question about "who is my neighbor." One could assume that in asking the question "who is my neighbor," in response to the command to "love your neighbor as yourself," the lawyer is looking to determine who deserves to be cared for. Is it just one's fellow Israelite, as a strict interpretation of Leviticus 19:18 might conclude? The focus then would have been on the victim of the robbery – was he a "neighbor" who deserved to be loved and cared for? But that is not Jesus' point at all. Jesus could have made the fallen man a Samaritan if that were the point – should we stop and help even our enemy? But in making a Samaritan the hero, Jesus insists that to fulfill the command to love our neighbor demands that we become the kind of person who treats everyone they meet – regardless of how frightening, alien, naked, or defenseless they are – with compassion. The question is not "who deserves my love/to whom do I have a legal obligation," but "to whom can I be neighborly/who can I give the gift of my time and my resources." The answer, of course, is "anyone." He tells the lawyer – "if you want to inherit eternal life, if you want to fulfill the command to love your neighbor, you need to take the same risks with your life, and with your possessions, that the Samaritan did!"

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

How does today's passage illustrate that even a seemingly straightforward command like "love your neighbor" is open to interpretation?

What does the act of "love" look like in the parable? How does that compare to your own willingness to "love" your neighbor?

What does a "neighbor" look like in the parable? How does that compare to who you are willing to consider a "neighbor"?

How would you tell the story if you were reframing it for a 21st century West Saint Louis County audience? Who would be the characters?

How far are you willing to go in your expenditure of time and resources to "love your neighbor"? Is it easier for you to spend one over the other (time or money)?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy God, we pray that You would form us into the kind of people who are willing to love our neighbors, however we might define "neighbors." Help us to overcome our prejudices, our fears, our busy-ness, and

our pride so that we can truly love others in the way that You love us. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Messiah. Amen.