

Luke 10:25–37 (NIV)

²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷He answered, “‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

²⁸“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

³⁶“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

What Does The Story Of The Good Samaritan Teach?

I can picture it in my head, gloriously dangling above the counter at Chuck E. Cheese. It was a four-foot-tall stuffed mouse with a purple shirt, and I wanted it. Chuck E. Cheese was a restaurant where you played games and won tickets, then you could use the tickets to buy prizes. I remember standing at the prize counter with my dad, ignoring the stickers at the bottom of the display, ignoring the slinky half way up. My eyes were locked on the four-foot-tall stuffed mouse with a purple shirt. “How do I get THAT?”



That moment in Chuck E. Cheese is what the story of the Good Samaritan is all about. A lot of people think that Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan as instructions for how to be a good person. Not quite. Some people think Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan as an illustration of how much God loves us. Not really. The truth is that Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to a Jewish man who was like a kid standing at the prize counter saying, “How do I get THAT?” Of course he didn’t want a stuffed mouse. He said, “**What must I do to inherit eternal life.**” (Luke 10:25) Jesus’ answer, “How do I get eternal life?”

“Love Your Neighbor.”

The story of the Good Samaritan shows us three things about that. 1. It’s impossible. 2. Jesus did it. 3. It’s possible.

It’s Impossible To Love Your Neighbor

It’s the set-up for the story of the Good Samaritan that actually shows us why Jesus told it. He’s approached by this expert in the law. You had to be an expert to know God’s law back in Jesus’ day because in the Old Testament God gave more than 600 different rules, plus humans added a bunch more unnecessary ones. This dude knew every single one; he had a PhD in G-O-D. And he thought that Jesus did not know the rules.

Experts in the law often got frustrated with Jesus because he would heal people on the Sabbath day, and rule number 346 said you should not work on the Sabbath. Jesus went to parties with public sinners, and rule number 786b said

you should stay away from those people. So this expert in the law decides he will test Jesus. **On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)** He’s saying, “Jesus WE know the law. WE know how to tell good people from bad people. Do YOU?” Jesus says, “You want to talk about the law, we can do that.” **“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26)** And the expert in the law gives a great answer. **He answered, “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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)**

Now I don’t know for sure, but I’d bet that the law-man thought he stumped Jesus. I bet he thought Jesus would say, “Well, you can’t be too strict. Nobody loves God *all* the time. You can’t love your neighbor *exactly* the way you love yourself. You can’t be so strict.” But Jesus said the opposite of that! I love this. Jesus said, “Yep!” **“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” (Luke 10:28)** If you are so morally good that you don’t just keep the ten commandments, but you really love God with everything you’ve got; if you’re not just a nice guy, but you truly treat other people better than yourself, you’ll be so good God has to let you into heaven.

And then the law-guy does what he thought Jesus would do! The irony! He says, “Whoa, whoa, whoa. Jesus. You can’t be too strict. I don’t have to love *everybody*. Maybe love your family or love your friends. But you can’t be too strict.” Luke says, **“He wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29).**

That’s when Jesus showed him just how huge God’s law is, and he did it by telling the story of the Good Samaritan. This story is designed to show just how impossible it is to keep God’s law.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. This is not far-fetched that road was called “The Way of Blood,” because lots of people got ambushed there. It was sparsely populated with lots of hideouts for robbers, so smart people only traveled in a group, on a horse, or with some Roman guards. This guy, not so smart. **They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.**

A priest happened to be going down the same road, A priest was the worship leader in God's temple, a holy man, a pastor-type. **and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.**

So too, a Levite, Levites were the lay people who helped the priests in the temple. The ancient altar guild, and ushers, a good church man. **when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.** Guys both priests and Levites, part of their job was to collect money to help the poor. Here's a poor person. There are two guys with money for the poor but... nothing. Jesus doesn't tell us what excuses they used because we know what excuses we use.

But a Samaritan, Samaritans were not good church people. They were half Jewish and half Assyrian. They worshiped the Lord half the time and other gods the other half. Jews hated them. A Jewish man would walk all the way around the Samaritan's country so he wouldn't accidentally run into a dirty Samaritan. In John chapter 8, Jesus' enemies are so mad they are trying to think of the worst thing they can call him so they say, "You're demon possessed and you're a... you're a... a, a SAMARITAN!" Jews used "Samaritan" like American racists use the N-word. And this Samaritan sees a Jew who hates him. **as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.** The Samaritan is putting himself in danger of being robbed while he stops to help. **Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.** The Samaritan is adding dozens of miles to his journey. He's definitely going to be late for his next appointment because he stopped to help. **The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'** A denarii is a day's wages. I don't know what that is for you, but if you work 8 hours at \$15 an hour, two "denarii" is \$240, plus he promised to reimburse the innkeeper more money.

Jesus turns to the expert in the law. **"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"** The expert in the law replied, **"The one who had mercy on him."** Jesus told him, **"Go and do likewise."**



Do you see what Jesus did to the law-man's religion? He says, "You thought 'Love your neighbor' meant love the people you like. It does. Love your family, love your friends, and love your enemies, love people who call you racial slurs, love people who the rest of the world hates. Love with your actions and your time and your money, so that it inconveniences you, and puts you in danger, and makes you poorer. Do that all the time, you can have eternal life.

So, do you love your neighbor? Or do you make excuses for why you can't love your neighbor?

I would help them, but they got themselves into the mess. You know, I'm not going to help people who waste their money on booze. I can't help people who keep making the same mistake over and over again. God can't expect me to help a guy who travels alone on "The Way of Blood," can he?

I would help people, but I don't have time or money. I can't donate because I don't have money, or really, I don't want to lower my standard of living. God can't expect me to give up my whole day or my wage, like the Samaritan did, can he?

I would help people, but that's what the government is for. Certainly the money we pay in taxes never gets mishandled. It always ends up helping the people who need it most. The government has a system for helping the poor, just like that priest and the Levite had a system. So God can't expect *me* to help, can he?

You want to hear something Jesus never said? "He never said, "Love your neighbor BUT NOT IF..." He did say, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And it is impossible.

When I looked up at the four-foot-tall stuffed mouse with a purple shirt, I asked my dad, "How do I get that." He said something like Jesus. Jesus said, "What does the law say?" My dad said, "What does the sign say?" It said how many tickets, and I was like, "Dad I didn't even know numbers went that high." It was like 50,000, and I had been playing ski-ball for 2 hours and I had like 4 tickets. I said, "Dad that is impossible!" That's exactly what Jesus wants you to know about pleasing God by keeping the law. You'll never do it. No one does. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) All fall short except Jesus.

Jesus Did Love Like That

In the story it says the Samaritan had pity on the beaten man. Pity is a word that means I don't love you because of how loveable you are. I love you in spite of how pitiful you are. I love you because of how loving I am. In the Bible that word is used most often to describe Jesus. Jesus had pity on you and on me.

Think of the excuses he could have made to not love us. "I would love them but they got themselves into that mess. They keep sinning over and over again. Some of them won't even accept my help." But Jesus didn't make that excuse. **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)** Jesus loves you.

Jesus could have said, "I would help them, but it affect my quality of life. Heaven's throne is not so bad, and the sinful world looks quite a bit worse. Plus the death seems literally excruciating." But Jesus didn't make that excuse. **"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)** Jesus loves you.

My friends, Jesus knows that you have failed miserably at helping people. He knows that you could never earn eternal life. So he did it for you. Not because of how loveable you are, but despite how pitiful you are, he loved you because of how loving he is.

It's Possible For You To Love Your Neighbor

Does that not fill your heart? Does that not shake you to your soul that somebody cares for you that way? That is what you can offer to people around you. Compassion. Love they don't deserve. Jesus-style love.

If you think that you have behaved so well that you earned God's love, then you will look at people who are struggling and you'll say, "You should perform better like me. Then maybe God will love you." It's delusional and disgusting, and I do it all the time. That's why loving your neighbor has to start with Jesus' love for you. Because when you know that Jesus loved you when you did not deserve it, then you will look at people who are struggling and you'll have compassion on them even when they don't deserve it.

What does Jesus' compassion mean to you? Heaven free and undeserved. How special is that for you? That's because God looked down on you and had compassion. If you are think you've earned God's love you won't have

compassion on anyone. If you know Christ had compassion on you, you'll be ready to have compassion on others.

The four-foot stuffed mouse with a purple t-shirt—you know what my dad did? He bought it. With cash. I didn't know you could do that! That's what Jesus has done for you. You'll never love people enough to earn eternal life—you might as well try to buy heaven with Chuck E. Cheese tickets! But Jesus bought heaven for you, because he loves you.

It's time to spread the love.

Amen? Amen.