

Moving People Toward Christ – Part 1, Engagement

Luke 10:25-42

Patrick Havens

July 23, 2017

Luke 10 is a familiar passage, the story of the Good Samaritan. I think you might be surprised at the meaning of this story as we look at it today. As we read Luke 10:25-42, be thinking about loving God and loving neighbors:

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And 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." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled

about many things,⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Let's pray.

God, bless this time. Help us go to the heart of what You're saying to each of us. We pray for this love. We pray that we would submit ourselves to Your will and Your Lordship. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the first nine chapters of Luke, Luke mainly deals with the question Who is Jesus? Starting in chapter ten, he's now addressing the question: what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? What does it mean to follow Him in this world? We can have a couple misconceptions about the meaning of the disciple or discipleship. One myth that's out there is that discipleship is for the really spiritual Christian, the one who is super-committed, who goes over the top. It's as if Jesus had two programs: one for those who are really eager to follow Him and another for those who just want life insurance. They're interested in going to heaven, but don't want a life change. That really isn't discipleship, is it? As a matter of fact, to be a disciple is to be a Christian. It's to be a believer in Christ who follows Him. So that's one correction the Gospels bring.

The second misconception about discipleship is that it's a program, sort of like a church's menu items: attend this class or join this group. But that thinking is too narrow. It's thinking that discipleship happens only once a week or only in the context of a group. When you start looking in the Gospels, you quickly realize discipleship includes everything in life, because all of life is now under the Lordship of Christ. We are now students of a Master and learning from Him.

As we dispel these myths, we'll also be introducing several themes over the next few weeks, using the tag line of "Moving Toward Christ." There are two priorities in our story, which indicates that there are two kinds of people in this world. First, there are people who are lost, who don't believe in Jesus and are still enslaved in darkness and may not even know it. Then there are those who have been rescued and who are being transformed. Scripture says they have been transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of God's Son. We're either in Christ and following Him, or we're still in Adam. There's an invisible line that divides the world. It divides churches, homes, neighborhoods and workplaces.

For those who are Christians, there still exists a spectrum of positions regarding our faith. There are two stages in Jesus' Kingdom. He brought the Kingdom when He came to earth. We might say He "bought the house," and now He owns it, but it's still being renovated. It's not yet complete and won't be until His second coming. If you've ever renovated a house, it's "all hands

on deck” with painting and changing the carpet and lighting. Everyone is involved—and that’s where we are now. We’re in the already/not yet part of the Kingdom. We have a lot to repent of, lots of growing to do and there’s a lot of work God has to do in our lives as well.

There’s also a spectrum in the domain of darkness. Some people really understand Christianity, while others may never even have met a Christian. Some places in our world are hostile, where the name of Jesus has never been spoken. Those places should be of concern to us. But even some of our neighbors may not understand what Christianity is about. I saw a video where people were asked, “What is the gospel?” Some said, “It’s a kind of black music.” Others said, “It’s in the Bible,” or “It’s what the priest does.” What is the gospel? It’s a message about Jesus Christ. It’s the good news. But the more foreign that news is to someone, the more questions they will have. That’s why we must engage people beyond simply evangelizing. We need to explain what Christianity is really about.

For example, a couple weeks ago the prime minister of Iraq announced in Mosul, “The military alliance has defeated ISIS and has pushed them out. Mosul is now liberated.” Wow, great news. I might mention this news at my dinner table, but my kids might ask, “Who is the prime minister of Iraq? How did ISIS get in there? What is ISIS doing now? How much destruction was there? How did Iraq push them out?” In other words, your understanding of these topics determines whether the news is good or not.

When someone hears about Jesus Christ, God, sin and faith, what they hear is affected by their understanding of those words. So this week and next week, we’re going to talk about how we should relate to a non-Christian world. It all comes down to loving our neighbor, in both words and deeds. This is what Jesus is emphasizing in this story. Love includes serving, giving of ourselves and caring for others. If you are a Christian and are under the Lordship of Christ, this must be one of your priorities.

One of our kids runs track, and I remember a coach telling the team right before they ran, “Get uncomfortable quick!” So that’s what I’m saying as well: “Get uncomfortable quick.” To realize this is a priority is going to push us. Being followers of Christ involves more than our own spiritual growth. We also need to have hearts for others. The challenge is: how much effort are we putting into this? Are we getting uncomfortable in our relationships and in our serving?

Let me explain the difference between evangelizing and engaging. Engagement includes asking questions. It might include telling a story. It could mean walking with someone. That’s what’s happening between Jesus and this lawyer. Jesus is engaging him. He’s not just trying to make him feel guilty, believe it or not. As we’ll see, Jesus is drawing him out, helping him to see things more clearly. So what prompted this lawyer to even ask Jesus his question? Verse 25 says

he stood up to test Jesus, saying, “*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus responded to the lawyer, “*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*” The lawyer is trying to engage Jesus, but Jesus is turning that back on him. This should bring us to ask ourselves, what are our motives for coming to Jesus?

I was once asked by someone interested in visiting our church, “Will I be comfortable there?” I said, “I hope so. We’d love to welcome you, to love and care for you. But why do you ask?” Then he began to describe some of his lifestyle choices. So I asked, “Do you mean you want to come to a church where no one confronts you about your sin?” Basically, that’s what he wanted. So I continued, “If you want to relate to a god Who never ruffles your feathers, who never disagrees with you, you basically want to worship a god you’ve made in your own image. But that’s not real. To meet the real Jesus, the real God, you must be prepared for Him to engage you, to confront you.”

Jesus is confronting this man in this passage. Although this man is not His follower, Jesus doesn’t just blow him off. He does engage him. We should ask ourselves: how much are we praying for and engaging our non-Christian friends? Or do we simply not interact with them on personal and spiritual matters? God-given wisdom is needed in these opportunities.

Jesus asks the lawyer, “How do you read the law?” Could you summarize the law the way this man does? He nails it. It’s exactly how Jesus summarizes the law in Matthew and Mark. He says, “*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*” (Luke 10:27). Jesus congratulated him on his response, saying, “*Do this, and you will live.*”

Let’s look at this passage under four headings: a distinct love, a difficult love, a dynamic love and a divine love.

A distinct love

These distinct commands are based on two commands from the Old Testament—one from Deuteronomy 6 and the other from Leviticus 19—love God and love your neighbor. Everything falls under these two commands. Notice how they’re brought together as the summary of the law. It’s inaccurate to think you can love God and not love your neighbor. If you don’t love your neighbor, you actually don’t love God. But it’s also inaccurate to think you love your neighbor, like Martha thought she was doing, and think it means you’re okay with God. She wasn’t, as Jesus pointed out. This should challenge each one of us.

Of course, our propensities may vary. Some groups spend a lot of time talking about loving God, while other groups focus on serving neighbors and doing acts of service. But unless

both of them are present, we don't truly understand how to love God. Love comes from Him. First John 4:19 says we love because He first loved us. It's love that is being given to us. That's a very distinct way to think about love.

A difficult love

John Calvin said there's nothing more difficult. In fact, it's impossible to think through this. I mean, what is required here? This is God's law; what does it demand of me? What is mandated in these verses? We are told love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. Wow. What's left? Nothing. The totality of what we are is to be about loving God. We are to love Him with every faculty, every capacity. It's what the law demands.

This includes our every thought, all our emotions, our bodies, our actions. Everything is to be about loving God. All our mind, soul, heart and strength are His. Therefore, everything about us should have this one consuming passion: our love for God. Have you ever stopped doing something just because you love God? Have you ever started doing something just because you love God? That's testing us.

Consider Mary here. How is she loving God? Where was she? She was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening, delighting in and loving Him, being energized by His words, soaking them up, learning from Him. This is a great picture of what it means to love God. It's listening to and learning from Jesus. It's sitting at His feet. It's delighting in Him and treasuring Him above all.

Think about how the psalmists spoke of their love for God. They're not vague. "I love You, God. You're my Strength, my Rock, my Fortress, my Deliverer." Their words have content. Or think about the many hymns about the love of God. Even the terrible poems in our pop culture are still about love. No one sings about their work. It's all about love relationships. Why? Because love is the center of who we are. St. Augustine says what really makes you what you are is not so much what you think or how you behave—it's what you love. Notice how the law is directed toward the heart.

The second command is like the first: we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We must love earnestly, with good will, doing them good at every possible turn. It's a very practical love. If I want to buy a table for my house, I can do that. But I'm commanded here to think about my neighbor, so maybe I need to buy a table at a price that leaves some money for them. It's a profound reality to live under the Lordship of Christ. Everything is now His. Nothing is really my will, what I want. It must all be submitted to Him.

You can see why the lawyer is wondering, "Who is my neighbor?" Luke says he wanted to justify himself. Think for a minute about his relationship with the law. He had a manageable

checklist, but he wanted some loopholes to keep himself out of trouble. He wanted the kind of relationship with the law that if he did certain things, he would be forgiven. That was how he thought. That's why he asked who his neighbor was, because he wanted some limits he could manage.

How does Jesus respond to his question, "Who's my neighbor?" He says, "Let Me tell you a story." Notice that He is engaging this man and his defective heart. He's still after this guy. He could have just blasted him away with some other statement. But because He's still going after his heart, He continues to engage him. So He tells him this story.

There was a certain man going from Jerusalem to Jericho. That was a 17-mile trek, dropping some 2,600 feet in elevation. There was a section of the road called *Adummim*, referring to blood, which was known for robberies. This man "*fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.*" Now by chance, a priest was going down that same road. The priest saw the man, but passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite came to that place, saw the man and also passed by on the other side.

So by now the lawyer was probably thinking, "This guy is setting me up." Jesus wasn't saying Pharisee or scribe, the men according to the Old Testament who were in charge of distributing alms. They were responsible for the poor. Instead, Jesus talks about a priest and a Levite, an assistant priest. Perhaps these two men were coming to Jerusalem to do their priestly services, but for whatever reason they passed by this man. If your view of the law is "outside in," with limits, something manageable, all about duty and avoiding God's anger and having life go okay, then there are times when this kind of duty doesn't reach far enough. It didn't work for these two men. Their calling and profession wasn't enough to make them stop to help the man who had been beaten. In other words, love for neighbor needs to go deeper. There has to be something more profound.

The real twist in the story, the shocker, is in verse 33: "*But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.*" Notice, all three men saw him. Two passed by, but one has compassion. We might have expected—after the priest, then the priest's assistant—that the third person might have been a Judean citizen. In that case, Jesus would be teaching us to just be ordinary; that ordinary people are the ones who help each other.

But He chose a Samaritan. This was a person who was theologically different, who worshipped in a different place than Jerusalem, and who was racially different. In fact, there was real enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews. This man was in a sense an enemy of the lawyer, yet he had compassion. And consider what he did. He "*bound up his wounds, pouring*

on oil and wine.” That was his first-aid kit. He then gave the man transportation to a place of safety, where he paid for his further treatment. He cared for him in every way needed.

Then Jesus asked the lawyer a question. Notice, it was different from the lawyer’s question. The lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus asks, “Who was neighborly? Who acted like a neighbor?” Jesus is saying, “Who is acting as they’re supposed to, as a neighbor?” And when the lawyer heard that question, he acknowledged it was the one who showed mercy. It seems like he couldn’t bring himself to use the word “Samaritan.” And Jesus simply responded, “*You go, and do likewise.*”

Think about what the lawyer should have said at this point. “Jesus, I can’t do it. I cannot love like this.” Notice that Jesus was really intending to get to the lawyer’s heart. If He had told the story differently, where the good guy was a Jew helping a Samaritan, the lawyer might have rejected the idea. After all, they were enemies. That story would not have touched his heart. But by reversing the roles—it could have been the lawyer on the road being attacked by the robbers—that went deeper. Or hopefully it did. We don’t know.

A dynamic love

In our third theme, love is dynamic. Christianity doesn’t work from the outside it—it works from the inside out. That’s the only way to truly understand love. Think about it. Who loves like this? Who loves their enemies? What foreigner comes to care for those who are hurting? Where do we see that kind of love? It causes us to cry out, “Not me!” But that’s the kind of love we see in Jesus. He came as a foreigner to care for and serve His enemies. That’s the most profound love possible.

Suppose we think love comes the other way, from the outside in. When we operate in this fashion, we make excuses for why we are not loving: “Jesus, helping that person would be too expensive. Caring for that person would be really dangerous. I could have been hurt.” Or, “I just didn’t have time. There was a really important meeting I needed to go to.” We frame our thoughts around justifying our choices. But if that’s our premise for life—if we try to make life manageable, checking off our lists—we will look for and find excuses, but still think of ourselves as righteous.

Until we really see what Jesus has explained, until we’re broken and understand we’re not able to love that way, our hearts will never be changed. But Jesus wants our hearts. This is what it means to live in His Kingdom, to believe the way He believes. And isn’t that what we desire? So put yourself on that road. Christ loved you like the Samaritan did. He came to you while you were His hostile, unbelieving, rebellious enemy. You were distanced from Him because of your

sin nature and you fully planned to keep on sinning. Yet He came to you and, having compassion on you, He rescued you. In fact, the most common emotion of Jesus described in the Gospels is compassion. He had pity on a leper and healed him. He saw the crowds and in His compassion said they were like sheep without a shepherd.

His heart was moved toward us and He transferred us from our darkness into a new Kingdom. He paid the full price for our redemption. All we owed was paid in full through His death on the cross. So when His love becomes part of our own hearts, that changes our relationship with those around us who don't believe in or know Him. It's been described like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. We were rescued, and now we're telling someone else Who the Rescuer is—because Jesus wants to rescue them as well.

This becomes our priority, because they are what we were. It makes us willing to serve them. We're even willing to be martyred for our faith, in order that they too might find Christ. Being a Christian, a disciple, means giving ourselves so others might know Him. For us, it probably won't mean martyrdom—but it might feel like it sometimes. We could definitely feel embarrassment, or be inconvenienced for people who are very different from us. But the more we receive Christ's love and care, the more we will be equipped and empowered to love others.

A divine love

Jesus loves us with a covenant love. When we're really stressed and think, "I can't love this person; it's too difficult for me," we should remind ourselves that He has loved us with an everlasting love. He has said to us, "I will never leave you or forsake you. I will get you through this. My love for you will not fail." We can love like no one else when His divine love becomes a reality to us.

Think about it. We might be neighborly geographically, but how much of our call to love captures our thinking, our praying, our time? If we consider our days to be under the Lordship of Christ—our schedules, our money, our priorities—we should ask, "Is Christ leading me in this? Or am I still following my own agenda?" Is this a place where we should repent? Can we ask the Lord, "Is this a place where You want me to grow?" We might be growing in our devotional life, in our love for Him, but do we have a growing heart for those who don't know Him? Andrew Lincoln says prayer is one of the primary means of cooperating in God's mission in the world. "God, break into my day. Open my eyes to see what You see." Maybe the person you're praying for is a minus ten in their relationship with the Lord and your God-ordained role is only to make them a minus nine. It would be great if they became a Christian, but maybe your role might be

just to bring them one step closer to realizing Christians aren't weird. Our desire is that people move toward Christ.

Rodney Stark, in his book The Rise of Christianity, describes the growth of the early church and how rapidly it blossomed. He cites a letter from the emperor Julian who was writing to a high priest in Galatia around 360 A.D. Julian was complaining about how the "impious Galileans supported not only their own poor, but ours as well. Everyone sees what they're doing." These Galileans were not only caring for their own poor, but also for the poor who believed differently.

Concerning the story of the Good Samaritan, John Wesley noted that our neighbors are not simply our acquaintances or our kinfolk or people with whose virtues we agree. Rather, our neighbor can be any person who is in need. That's who we're called to. That's who the commands of Jesus are referring to. And sometimes we can't even know a person's need until we demonstrate to them that we care about them. We need to listen to them and show an interest in their lives. They might be having family conflicts or challenges with their children or tensions in their workplace. If we begin to interact with them and show a willingness to serve them, God can use us to begin moving them one step closer to Him. So let's ask God to mobilize us as His people in these good works He has prepared for us.

Jesus, thank You that this is really Your work. We cannot do this—it's above us. But rather than making us feel guilty, Your desire is for us to cry out to You for help. Help us to reorient our schedules, change how we think about people and add them to our prayer list. Help us follow You in this area of loving our neighbor. You are Lord over this calling and we want to give ourselves to You in it. Equip, encourage and build us up, in Christ's name. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net