

## INTRODUCTION

There's a funny story about St. Peter admitting people at the gates of heaven. St. Peter asks one man who appears, "Tell me one act of kindness that you committed during your life." The man said, "Once I saw a rough looking gang of motorcycle riders harassing an old lady. I walked right up and punched the gang leader in the nose!" St. Peter said, "When did that happen?" The guy said, "About 30 seconds ago."

Sometimes you can get in trouble when you try to help somebody!

Today we are going to talk about the Good Samaritan, a person who performed an act of kindness and became famous. We don't know his name but virtually everyone has heard of the Good Samaritan. We name hospitals after him; we have a Good Samaritan Outreach Center, and the Good Sam RV club. We even have Good Samaritan laws protecting citizens from being liable if they stop and render aid to injured strangers. Some states have Good Samaritan laws *requiring* citizens to lend aid. If you were one of the seventy-five million Americans watching the final episode of Seinfeld several years ago, you'll remember Jerry and his friends were arrested in Massachusetts because they stood by and didn't help a man being robbed. The arresting officer told them they broke the Good Samaritan law.

All of this comes from a beautiful little story Jesus told 2,000 years ago. I am going to preach two Sundays on the Good Samaritan and I'll be using these two messages to launch what we are calling LYN week. If you haven't already figured it out, LYN stands for Love Your Neighbor. Beginning Sunday afternoon, September 9, we are going to be performing hundreds of intentional acts of kindness in the East Texas area. As we examine this passage today, let's walk through it slowly. You'll notice the entire discussion centers around three questions.

### I. THE ALMOST-RIGHT QUESTION (v. 25)

On one occasion an expert of the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 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.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

The lawyer asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Sounds like a good question, but Jesus answered the question by asking a question of His own. I read recently Jesus asked over 300 questions in the four gospel accounts. I haven't counted yet but I wouldn't be surprised if that was correct: He was always listening to people. He asks, "What do *you* think?" Every morning, Orthodox Jews recited the Shema, it spoke of loving God with all one's being. But this astute lawyer even added the admonition from Leviticus 19 about loving one's neighbor as well. Jesus says, "Good answer!"

In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was. His answer was the same. He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with everything you've got ... and the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself." Then Jesus said, "on these two

commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40) Then, with a twinkle in His eye Jesus said in verse 28, “Do this and you will live.” The word for *live* is not *bios*, which would signify health or biological life. It’s the word *zoa*, which means a “full and meaningful life.”

The lawyer’s question was *almost* right but “almost only counts in horseshoes, grenade throwing, and the “gimme” putts of some of the guys I play golf with. There is one little word in the lawyer’s question that spoils it. Have you found it yet? Here’s a clue:

### **ETERNAL LIFE: the greatest issue of life but it can’t be inherited by what we *do***

The quest for eternal life is a good one, and every one of us should be on.

The lawyer said, “What must I DO to inherit eternal life?” You and I can’t DO anything to gain eternal life. Jesus has already done everything that needs to be done. You don’t have to *do* anything to inherit something. Do you know *why* I inherited a few dollars when my mother died? Because I was her son; I didn’t have to *do* anything. I inherited because I was part of the family. On January 16, 1953, I was born into her family and I really didn’t have to do anything that day—except show up!

The only way to inherit eternal life is to be born into the Family of God. Actually, we get adopted but there’s nothing you can do. But once you are in the family you are an heir. We sing, “I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God. I’ve been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood. Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod.”

Jesus was issuing a challenge when He said to the lawyer, “Do this and live.” Why? Because the lawyer knew he couldn’t do it 100% of the time. Some of you still think there is something you can do to gain eternal life. Jesus says to you, “Do this (keep all the commandments) and you shall live.” I want to take a little survey. I want everyone in this room to raise your hand if you have *never* broken one of the Ten Commandments. Anybody? Don’t raise your hand; because if you do, you’re breaking the one that says, “You shall not bear false witness.” Okay, so all of us have already forfeited that chance! We need some help! Eternal life is not a routine or a ritual; it is a relationship. Once again, let me quote John 17:3, when Jesus said, “and this is eternal life—that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Here’s the difference between living under the law and living under grace:

**The law says: Do this and live (impossible)**

**Grace says: Live and do this! (Possible through Jesus)**

So instead of trapping Jesus, the lawyer is trapped by his own logic. Knowing that he fell far short of loving his neighbors, He asks for a clarification. That leads to the second question:

## **II. THE WRONG QUESTION (v. 29)**

But he wanted to justify himself, [as a lawyer, he was looking for a loophole] so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Here’s the wrong question: **Who is my neighbor?**

It may sound like a pretty good question to you, but it misses the point. This question addressed a debate among Jewish experts of the law. Rabbis disagreed about who was included in this commandment. Exactly who was it they *had* to love as a neighbor? Now Jesus could have gone into a theological discussion with the lawyer and traced the etymological roots of the Hebrew word for “neighbor” (*nea*) from Leviticus 19. The Jewish lawyer and the crowd would have had no trouble with Jesus answer if He simply said, “Your neighbor is the person who lives close to you—that person who is a lot like you.” If Jesus said, “Your neighbors are your Jewish people,” everyone would have been satisfied.

But instead of a theological treatise or a seminar on cultural anthropology, Jesus tells a simple, poignant story. Since everyone here has heard the story before, let’s walk through it slowly and study what Jesus was saying. Some literary experts call this the greatest short story ever written: it includes a tragedy, villains, a plot twist, a hero and a good ending.

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers.

Jesus doesn’t say whether the man is a Jew or a Gentile, because in the end, it shouldn’t matter. I’ve traveled this same road many times. In the space of 17 miles the elevation drops from 2,300 feet above Sea Level in Jerusalem to 1,300 feet below Sea Level at Jericho. It’s a narrow, twisting road full of hairpin turns and caves in which robbers could hide. Today the only robbers are the little Bedouin kids who charge you \$3 to take a picture of them sitting on a camel—and for \$5 you can sit on the camel!

They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

The fact they removed his clothes created a problem: A person’s cultural identity was revealed by how they dressed. Even today, Arabs and Jews dress differently. The fact that this man was naked prevented passersby from determining if he was a Jew or a Gentile.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

Here are the first two surprises. Surely these religious professionals—the good guys—would help this hurting man! After all, it was their job. But because the man was not dressed, they feared he might be a gentile and Orthodox Jews hated Gentiles. They wouldn’t even touch one. Jewish storytelling usually followed a pattern of three’s, so after two failures, the audience would have been expecting the next character to do better. Surely they suspected the third traveler would be a simple Jewish man who would help the wounded stranger—but Jesus had another big surprise!

But a Samaritan,...

Whoa! The jaws of the audience must have dropped at that! The kind of animosity existing between Israelis and Palestinians today closely follows how poorly Jews and Samaritans got along in Jesus’ time. Jesus doesn’t call him a “good” Samaritan. That’s a label we have added. To the Jews, the phrase “Good Samaritan” would have been an oxymoron, two words canceling each other out, like “jumbo shrimp” or “Cowboys football.” The Samaritan should have been the villain but Jesus makes him the hero.

as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

The word literally means he got a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach because he was so concerned.

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

Travelers usually didn’t carry bandages. The wounded man was naked so obviously this traveler took some of his own clothes and ripped them into strips to be tied around the wounds of the stranger. His oil and wine came from the meager food supply he would travel with. He used these to cleanse the wounds and revive the stranger. Obviously the man was so injured he couldn’t walk, so

Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins 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.’

This wasn’t the way Jesus’ audience expected the story to end. The Jewish listeners would have been stunned by the Samaritan’s behavior. Into the moment of silence at the end of the story, Jesus inserted His own question. It was:

### III. THE RIGHT QUESTION (v. 36)

Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The expert in the law replied, [At this point, I think the lawyer is so upset he can’t even bring himself to say the word “Samaritan.” Maybe he said, “Uh, the S ... Saa .... Saamm ...” then he said] “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

There is the clear directive. Our behavior toward people should follow the model behavior of this Samaritan.

The right questions is: **To whom may I BE a neighbor?**

Jesus was saying it is much more important for us to be a neighbor than to split hairs over *whom* is our neighbor. Our neighbor is *anyone* to whom we can show love and kindness.

All God’s commands can be summarized in these two principles: Love God and love your neighbor. Are you doing that? In I John 4:20, we are told. “If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” Now, let’s leave the story and learn five very practical lessons from the Samaritan. We will use it as the basis to learn

## HOW TO L.Y.N.

### 1. Demonstrate kindness to strangers

Someone said kindness is love with its work clothes on. The true test of love is *not* whether we can love those whom we know and those who love us. This parable is all about showing love and kindness to a total stranger. Jesus put it this way in the Sermon on the Mount:

Jesus said, “If all you do is love those who love you, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that! If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that!” (Matthew 5: 46-47 *The Message*)

Do you know why we love some people? We love them so they will love us back. We want people to love us. From the time you wrote that very first love note in grammar school reading, “Dear Mary/Dear Bob, I love you. Do you love me? Check yes or no.” Sometimes we’d insert, “P.S. Even if you don’t love me, I’ll still love you.” But we didn’t mean the last part. If Bob or Mary checked “no” that was the end of that romance! We still do it when we get older. But loving someone so they will love us in return is actually pretty selfish. Jesus said even sinners do that!

Jesus taught a kind of love that should be directed toward those who won’t pay us back—to strangers—and even to our enemies. Are you going to help us LYN? Let me ask you, “Who are your neighbors?” Did you think about the people who live near you? They are included. That’s a good place to start but a bad place to end. Our English word “neighbor” comes from two old Anglo Saxon words: *neigh* meaning “near” and *gebur* meant “dweller.” So the word actually means “those who dwell near us.” But in this parable Jesus expanded the application to mean our neighbor is anyone who would benefit from our kindness. During LYN week, we are going to ask you to participate in intentional acts of kindness to strangers. We have some activities already planned. We are going to wash people’s windshields, wash their cars, take them cookies and cakes, pass out free bottles of ice water, and a dozen other acts of kindness to total strangers. And we aren’t going to accept a thin dime from them. Why? Because Jesus told us to love our neighbors and that includes total strangers!

A few weeks ago, I conducted the funeral of a great man in our community, Corky Boyd. His brother told me Corky loved to do kind things for people without getting any recognition or return. He told me Corky reminded him of the little boy in the movie *Pay It Forward*. I hadn’t seen the movie, but I couldn’t forget the statement. So a few weeks ago, I got the movie and watched it at home. Now if you haven’t seen it and want to see it, close your ears. It’s about a little boy who wants to try to make the world a better place. He comes up with the idea of doing some great act of kindness to three total strangers and instead of them paying *him* back they, in

turn, have to do the same to three more strangers and tell them to pay it forward. The movie begins with a reporter at a crime scene watching his old car getting smashed. A total stranger walks by and gives him the keys to his Jaguar and tells him to pay it forward. The reporter traces the idea back to this 11-year-old kid. That’s not too far off from what Jesus was teaching in this story. You haven’t really loved your neighbor until you have demonstrated love to someone who is stranger and as far as you know, doesn’t have the capability to “pay you back.”

In our church, we are usually kind and generous to each other. The members of this church demonstrate an amazing level of love and compassion to one another. But are we showing the same kind of kindness to strangers? Even if they are dirty? The wounded man was messy and bloody. The Samaritan got dirty and bloody when he bandaged him and cleaned his wounds. Will we show the love of Jesus to strangers? Even if they are dirty and wounded?

A homeless woman in New York City turned away by a church wrote this poem:

I was hungry, and you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger.  
I was imprisoned, and you crept off quietly to the chapel and prayed for my release.  
I was naked, and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.  
I was sick, and you knelt and thanked God for your health.  
I was homeless, and you preached to me the spiritual shelter of the love of God.  
I was lonely, and you left me alone to pray for me.  
You seem so holy, so close to God but I am still very hungry—and lonely—and cold.

## **2. See the value of small acts of kindness**

The Samaritan didn’t have much but he used what he had. He used his clothes for bandages and he poured oil and wine on the wounds. He used what he had to help the poor wounded stranger. There is tremendous value in performing small acts of kindness.

Jesus said, “Why, anyone by just giving a cup of cold water in my name is on our side. Count on it that God will notice.” (Mark 9:41 *The Message*) That’s exactly what I’m going to be asking you to do during LYN week. We are going to give out thousands of free bottles of water to hot thirsty people—all in the name of Jesus. Jesus said God notices that.

Not all of us can be like a Mother Teresa and give our entire lives to helping hurting people. But Mother Teresa once said, “None of us can do anything great on our own, but we can all do a small thing with great love.”

## **3. Practice love that goes beyond normal kindness**

There is a level of human decency and kindness many people display. You don’t have to be a Christian to be kind. There are many people who are into what is often called “random acts of kindness.” Some people even confuse kindness with salvation. I’ve heard people say some lady must surely be in heaven because she showed kindness to animals and to strangers. Being kind won’t get you into heaven: only knowing Jesus will get you into heaven. As Christians, we don’t love our neighbor to *earn* salvation; we love our neighbors *because* we are saved. Jesus-directed

kindness always goes beyond the human level of expectation. What would “human decency” have expected from the Samaritan? Maybe he could have stayed there by the road until the man could walk on his own and then head on his own way. But he did more. Maybe he could have taken him to the inn and left him. But he did more. Maybe he could have told the innkeeper the wounded man would be responsible for his own expenses. But he did more. Maybe he could have said, “Don’t let his expenses exceed these two silver coins.” But he did more. That’s real loving kindness. Jesus said, “If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (Matthew 5:41). It was expected of the Jews under Roman occupation to carry a soldier’s supplies for one mile *only*. Jesus said love always goes the second mile.

During LYN week, I want you to think about creative ways to show kindness to strangers. It means you will have to ask yourself this question: “What is *normal* human kindness?” Then, “What can I do that represents the *second mile* of loving kindness?” Here’s the last suggestion on how to LYN:

#### **4. Give God the credit for your kindness**

This is extremely important. What’s the difference between a non-believer’s random act of kindness and our performance of an intentional act of kindness? As followers of Christ, the goal of our kindness *must* be that God receives the honor and glory for our good deed. Jesus spoke of giving a cup of cold water in His name—that’s the key.

Let’s say you go out to Rose Rudman walking trail with a cooler of iced down water bottles and hand them out to the joggers and walkers. That’s a good thing to do and we’re going to do that. But if you do it without connecting your kindness to God, the recipients of that kindness are going to glorify you. They are going to tell *you* what a nice, kind person you are. But, if you pass out bottles of water with a little note saying you are doing that kind act to let them know God loves them, it changes the entire scenario: God is the one who gets the primary glory! And they *still* think you are a nice, kind person but they will suspect you are acting that way because of God.

Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) When we saturate East Texas with good deeds starting September 9, we are going to make sure our Father in heaven gets the credit. We are printing over 20,000 LYN cards. All our LYN activities will use them. Plus, we want to have enough for you to take several to give out as you perform your own creative acts of kindness. When you hand out this card, God is the one getting the glory.

LYN week starts next Sunday afternoon, Sept. 9. We aren’t going to have a worship service here. Instead we are going to meet here and head out into our community, where the people are and do some of these acts of kindness. If you are interested in volunteering for some of the more structured events that week, you can check at the Welcome Center information desk as you leave.

People, Jesus told us we have an obligation to show His love to those in our community. That’s what LYN is all about. It’s simply a week of a concentrated, intentional effort to do what we should be doing all the time anyway!

This is the easiest form of evangelism. You may not have a gospel presentation memorized but you can give a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name. We get so comfortable loving the members of our church we forget those people out there without Christ need our love, too.

I’ve asked this fundamental question before but it is one every one of us must answer if we are going to be on the same page in this church. Here’s the question: Does Green Acres exist primarily to meet the needs of those who are already here in our church? That is, our own members. Or does Green Acres primarily exist to reach out and claim those who have not yet accepted the love of Jesus?

How you answer that question will determine everything about what we do. How we greet guests, the music we use, the messages I preach, the ministry strategy we follow. How do you answer that question? You need to know how I answer it if you want to understand how I’m trying to lead our church. I believe we exist *primarily* to reach the lost and train them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus. I agree with one of my heroes, Charles Spurgeon who wrote:

“Not for yourself, O Church, do you exist any more than Christ existed for Himself. His glory was that He laid aside His glory, and the glory of the church is when she lays aside her respectability and her dignity and counts it to be her glory to help hurting people outside her doors and her highest honor to seek amid the foulest mire the priceless jewels for whom Jesus shed his blood.”

Our job is to take the love of Christ we have received and share it with our neighbors outside the four walls of this church. Even if you don’t carry State Farm Insurance, you are probably familiar with their slogan: Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.<sup>®</sup> That should be our motto as we go out into this world: Like good neighbors, we are there to love. Will you make a commitment today that you will be like the Good Samaritan and LYN?

## OUTLINE

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ETERNAL LIFE: The greatest issue of life—but it can't be inherited by what you DO

### II. THE WRONG QUESTION (v. 29)

WRONG: Who is my neighbor?

### III. THE RIGHT QUESTION (v. 36)

RIGHT: To whom may I BE a neighbor?

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes