

“How to Measure Love”

Text: Luke 10:25-37

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Park Boulevard Presbyterian Church (www.pbpc.org)

Oakland, California

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Sermon styles: Different ways to proclaim the word of God—expository (break down a passage and explain it), topical, Q&A, others. What I have learned over the past six months is that as a whole the PBPC church family is more comfortable with expository preaching, which I have been doing with this current series.

- I will predominately preach this way, but there will be times when I will do a topical series or pull a topic from a passage and preach on it. There are times when I think it is helpful to know what all of God’s word has to say about topics that are meaningful to you.
- I hold a high view of scripture and will continue to preach the Word of God to you with integrity.

This morning we conclude our series “Journey to Justice”. We have been looking at justice and the life of Jesus through the Gospel of Luke. Justice for the Christian is to do what is morally right according to the Word of God. Today we’ll be looking at “How to Measure Love”. The Bible passage we will be looking at is Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37.

Read Luke 10:25-37 & Pray!

Before we look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan I want to set this parable up by looking at Jesus’ dialogue with the expert of the law.

1. The expert in the law asks Jesus a question that had been debated by Jewish religious leaders for generations and is still an apropos question for all people today, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
2. Jesus’ response is to put a question back to him, asking him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”
 - Strict Orthodox Jews would wear around their wrists little leather boxes called phylacteries, which contained certain passages of scripture— Exodus 13, Deuteronomy 6 & 11 & Leviticus 19:18.
 - Jesus was saying to the scribe, “Look at the phylactery on your own wrists to answer your question.”
3. The scribe quotes the Great Commandment and second Great Commandment. Jesus then challenges him to put his answer into practice, only to have the scribe ask Jesus to clarify “Who is my neighbor?”
 - The Rabbis at their worst confined the definition of neighbor to their fellow Jews. There were actually laws in place against helping non-Jews.

This is a justice issue. Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, yet how often do we justify ourselves by confining the definition of who our neighbor is to people we like or who are most like us? How do we love our neighbor? Let's look at three principles from Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan to see what we can learn about loving our neighbor?

I. Lack of love is often easy to justify, even though it is never right.

- A. Jesus starts off telling us that a man was on his way to Jericho when he came across robbers who stripped him, beat him and left him half dead on the road. The need of help for this man is obvious to anyone who is on the road.
- B. Luke 10:31 – *“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.”*
 1. The priest quickly passed the injured man. The priest would have known that whoever touched a dead man was unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:11). Was the man dead? To touch him would mean losing his turn of duty in the Temple; and he refused to risk that. The Temple and its liturgy meant more to him than the pain of people.
 - **Video**
 2. The Levite, who was a Temple assistant, knew that bandits were in the habit of using decoys. One of their number would act the part of a wounded man; and when some unsuspecting traveler stopped over him, the others would rush upon him and overpower him. The Levite was a man whose motto was, “Safety first.” He would take no risks to help anyone else.
- C. Jesus is our model. Paul writes in Romans 5:6-8, *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love of us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*
 1. Did Jesus risk himself for us? Yes! Did Jesus set aside religion to die for us so that we might have a new life in Him? Yes!
- D. What excuses have you used to justify not helping another person? Remember, Jesus says to His followers, *“Deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Me.”* Following Jesus is risky!

II. Our neighbor is anyone of any race, creed, or social background who is in need.

- A. Luke 10: 33 - *“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.”*
- B. Samaritans were defined by one of two distinctions:
 1. Samaritans were regarded as unclean people, descendants of the mixed marriages between Jews and Assyrians that followed from the Assyrian settlement of people from various regions in the fallen northern kingdom of Israel in the seventh century B.C. They lived primarily in Samaria, between the northern and southern part of Israel.

2. A Jew might be called a Samaritan for their laxness in Jewish observances. Jesus is called a Samaritan in John 8:48.
- C. The Jews would have nothing to do with Samaritans. By depicting a Samaritan as the hero of the story, Jesus, demolished all boundary expectations. Social position—race, religion or social background—count for nothing. The injured man will not discriminate among potential helpers. Anyone who has compassion and stops to help him is his neighbor. So, Jesus invalidates all stereotypes. Community can no longer be defined or limited by such terms. Neither can Jesus' church.
 1. African American man helping shot police officers.
- D. Jesus says in John 3:16 – *“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*
 1. Black, white, yellow, brown, rich, poor, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish or atheist...love knows no boundaries for the Christian. Who is your neighbor? Anyone and everyone.

III. Love means acting to meet the person's need.

- A. Luke 10:34-35 – *“He went to him and bandaged his wound, pouring on oil and wine. 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.’”*
- B. Love is active. Look at the verbs in these two sentences: He *went* to him, *bandaged* his wound, *pouring* oil and wine on them, *put* him on his donkey, *took* him to an inn, *took care* of him and *paid* the innkeeper to look after him. Love is active.
- C. 1 John 3:18 – *“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”*
- D. Just as the Good Samaritan spared no expense to care for the injured man's needs. God calls us to love our neighbor by making ourselves available to meet the needs of those around us.
- E. Christian writer and speaker, Jill Briscoe tells this story: Years ago, as I waited in line at a local shop, I heard the gossip. My neighbor's husband had left her. The night before he had packed his things into a van and driven out of her life. I knew my neighbor casually. When we did speak, which wasn't often, it was about the weather. Our subdivision was the type where people led their own lives and neighbors didn't really get to know one another. When I returned home, I struggled with what to do. Should I visit my neighbor, or pretend I knew nothing about her situation and go on with my day? In my mind I could see her sitting at her kitchen table, alone. She was in her fifties and her kids were grown. Finally, I got up the courage and walked over to her house. When she opened her door, I said, “I heard through the grapevine your husband left you last night. Can I do anything to help?” Immediately, she burst into tears and said, “Come in. Come in.” I spent the entire morning with her—listening, putting my arm around her, and having coffee. It was the start of a relationship.

F. Close your eyes and ask God to bring someone to mind who has a need that He wants you to meet. Who is that person and what does God want you to do? Now go and have mercy on them.

Wherever you live, needy people are close by. There is no good reason for refusing to help. Our churches would be filled to overflowing if Christians lived their lives like the Good Samaritan. We need God's help.

How do you measure love? Let the Good Samaritan be your litmus test.

PRAYER

Father, oh how we are so much like the expert in the law. Forgive us when we justify not loving another person. Forgive us when we allow stereotypes to keep us from loving our neighbor. Forgive us when we have pity on people, but do nothing to meet their needs. Lord, we need your strength and help to have mercy on the people around us. We want to love our neighbor as ourselves. Give us the courage and resources to use what You have given us to be love in action to those in need. And let us remind people of Your love and forgiveness for them through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.