

Luke 10:25-37 (NIV) ²⁵ On 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?" ²⁷ 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'; {27 Deut. 6:5} and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" {27 Lev. 19:18} ²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." ²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins {35 Greek 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 neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

“Things that Will Endure: Acts of Love”

Recently, I was listening to a friend share one of his “joys of parenting” stories concerning his four year old daughter. She was wanting something really badly that he didn’t want her to have. Every parent knows this frustration. Children can be relentless when they “want” something. It can become a life or death matter for them. Well, to help him in this moment my friend leaned on a bit of parenting advice that I think is very sound. He said, “It’s when they deserve it least that our children need our love the most.” That’s great advice. It’s very God-like advice because that’s the way God deals with us.

It’s hard advice to follow though. Trying to figure out what form that love should take is quite difficult particularly when the child has managed to push every button possible in you and your own anger is about to get the best of you. We’ve all seen situations in grocery stores when a child really wants something and is threatening all out nuclear war if he doesn’t get it. What’s a parent to do? Right answer: Remove the child from the situation no matter how much of a scene he makes and come back for the groceries later and most importantly say as little as possible while you’re doing it. The inconvenience of coming back is all part of parenting. When William gets in those states, we usually say “whining and tantrums will get you nowhere” and remove him from the “temptation”. And, as best as we can while we’re removing him we try to give him a hug and comfort him. It’s hard for him. He just doesn’t have the ability to control his emotions like an adult yet (most adults don’t have it either). But, you know you’ve won when he stops kicking and starts holding on for a shoulder to cry on.

Unfortunately, sometimes we just plain get love all wrong. Like when we think we’re teaching a child not to have tantrums by giving them what they want before it escalates. We just make them ask politely. Or, when we give in believing we’re just picking our battles wisely. The worst is when a parent decides that violence is the best way of teaching a child. We’ve all seen children not fair so well in those situations. I’ve seen parents cuss at their children and beat them over a piece of candy or a box of cereal. It becomes all to clear who has the anger management problem and who the child inherited the temper from.

Changing gears a little bit, being a bystander to a grocery store incident gone bad is quite difficult. How do we define love then? Most times we just walk away thinking we don't want to make things anymore embarrassing than they are or worse, find ourselves in a fight. We often just look down our noses thinking if someone has nerve enough to cuss and beat their child in public, then they aren't going to listen to reason anyway. But, the grocery store incident is probably a very appropriate time to hear the question Jesus put to the young lawyer: Which of the three was a neighbour to the man who had been robbed and beaten? Was it the priest who walked by on the other side of the road? Was it the Levite who also walked by on the opposite side of the road? Or, was it the Samaritan who bandaged him, took him to an inn, and had the man looked after?

The young lawyer seeking to justify himself wanted Jesus to tell him who qualified to be his neighbour. He was willing to help as long as he knew who his neighbour was and if the neighbour met his standards. Of course, Jesus turned the question back on him asking the lawyer, "what kind of a neighbour are you?" One could say that it was a bit of an insult for Jesus to imply that a Samaritan was a better neighbour than the Jerusalem righteous who were just obeying the Law of Moses which says touching a dead person left a person ritually unclean and unable to go into the Temple for seven days. Kicking it up a notch, since both of them worked in the Temple and the priest probably lived there, if either the Priest or the Levite had touched the man and he was dead, they would have been quite put out. Unfortunately, it doesn't say in the Law of Moses that if you see someone left for dead, help them. That should be a common sense act of loving kindness, but as we have seen, trying to justify oneself often leaves us doing the unloving thing rather than acting according to love like the Samaritan. It's easy to find excuses that leave us feeling like we're in the right and walk away; like in the a grocery store incident instead of intervening for the sake of the child...and the parent.

My friend's parenting advice goes a long way when it comes to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It's when people deserve it the least that they need our love the most. The Samaritan gives us a good example of what love is and how to love. He stopped to help the wounded man. He dressed the man's wounds. He carried the man on his beast of burden. As the man had been robbed and had no money, the Samaritan provided for the man until he was well.

Applying this to us, everyone in life is a victim. Everyone has been wounded. It is from our own woundedness that we can either bring healing to others by listening and understanding and helping them to see what their next steps need to be. Or, because of our woundedness we can hurt others. Unfortunately, it tends to be the case that we hurt others because we have been hurt first and most times we do so unknowingly and unintentionally. The likelihood of a child who's been cussed and beaten doing the same to others is very high. In the case of childhood sexual abuse, the child has a forty percent chance of growing up to do the same. If you are ever going to do ministry with child abusers you really have to train your heart to see that person as themselves, being an abused child, and work from there. The first step in doing acts of love is to see people in their woundedness and be moved with compassion.

The next step is to try to dress the wounds. Most times in life we avoid helping people with their wounds because we are uncomfortable talking about the "difficult" things of people's lives. But you can't help a broken arm heal by giving a foot massage. When comes to helping people heal we have to deal with the wounds. The Samaritan poured oil and wine directly onto the man's wounds and dressed them. So, I think it's a good idea to always carry around a bottle of salad dressing. Seriously, there's never anything wrong with asking a person what hurts just like you would a child and remember all you've got to do is listen and try to steer them towards forgiveness. Most people don't like it when you try to solve their problems. They just want to be heard.

The next thing the Samaritan did was to take it upon himself to carry the man as a burden. Most people won't ask for help because they don't want to be a burden to someone else. Most people won't offer help because they don't want to be burdened with another person. Yet, love requires that we let ourselves be burdened by other people even if it costs

us greatly. This is why. When wounds start healing all of a sudden people don't have to be the way we used to be which was largely living from their woundedness and trying to protect themselves. When people are healing, it is a crucial time for caring people to step up and demonstrate how to live healthily. Healing people need Christian community around them. Sometimes, we even have to bear them as a financial burden. Sometimes we may even need to open our homes to them.

So far in this series we have talked about forgiveness and justice. Acts of love, Samaritan love, are what justice and forgiveness rely on. We bring justice into the world through acts of love no matter how small or big. Go forth and be those who love. Meet and help people in their woundedness, dress their wounds, and welcome them into your life in sacrificial ways even if it means they will be a burden. Amen.