

THE GREAT COMMISSION

A *Vision 195* Series

STUDY SIX

Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37

What the ball is to the game, what the musical note is to the symphony, what the book is to the librarian, what the diaper is to the mother of babies, a neighbor is to the Christian.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE has neighbors. Whether you share a wall in an apartment building or a long stretch of country road, sharing life with a neighbor can be such a blessing. You can always swing by for an egg or a cup of flour. They trust you enough to watch their pets while they're away on vacation. Your children forge friendships and play together at each of your homes.

Having a neighbor, however, doesn't necessarily make someone a *good* neighbor. If God has *physically* placed these neighbors in our lives, He must have a bigger *spiritual* purpose than simply sharing space with someone else.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study focuses on the familiar story of “The Good Samaritan,” which forces us to grapple with what it means to be a *good* neighbor. The picture Jesus paints of a good neighbor is both more broad and more beautiful than what we might think . . . or even care to imagine.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to dive into the waters of God’s Word and swim with the characters, the imagery, and its truths, ask God to give you eyes to see clearly what it means to be a good neighbor. Write your prayer in the space below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Who is my neighbor?

This question from a legal expert prompted Jesus to respond in Luke 10:25–37, not with a straightforward answer but with a *parable*. Jesus told these colorful stories to reveal truths about Himself, God, or His kingdom. He did so because ideas often resonate with us more deeply when we are led from the familiar to the mysterious—from what we know to what we can only imagine.

However, Jesus rarely explained the purpose of His parables, so His audience occasionally missed His point. Here are a couple tips to help you understand Jesus’ parable:

1. Each parable has only one theme. We must resist the temptation to look for multiple themes or to search for hidden meaning behind every image. As a wise man once said: “We can’t make a parable walk on all fours.”
2. Always read a parable in its context. Seeing what event, conversation, or question prompted Jesus to tell the parable will help us see *why* Jesus even chose to tell a parable at all.

With these ideas in mind, turn to Luke 10:25–37 and see how this question about neighbors prompted Jesus to tell the well-known parable of “The Good Samaritan.”



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Observation: A Talk and a Tale

Read *Luke 10:25–37*, and allow the tips above to guide you. Be sure to *observe* the questions the characters ask and how other characters answer to see the parable's context.¹

A Talk—Luke 10:25–29

According to *Luke 10:25*, what did the legal expert hope to do by approaching Jesus? What question did he ask?

In *10:28*, Jesus showed that the legal expert knew the correct answer to his own question. What did the lawyer say in *10:27* that someone must do to inherit eternal life?

According to *10:29*, what was the second question the legal expert asked? Why did he ask it?



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These observations may seem random or even insignificant, but this context will help us make sense of the meaning of Jesus' parable in the interpretation phase of our study.

A Tale—Luke 10:30–37

According to [10:31–33](#), who were the three people who witnessed the naked, beaten, and abandoned Jewish man?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Which of the three stopped to help the needy man? _____

Reread [10:34–35](#). What kinds of sacrificial actions did the Samaritan do to help the needy man?

What question did Jesus ask to conclude His story in [10:36](#)? How did the legal expert respond in [10:37](#)?

Jesus didn't ask, "Who is my neighbor?" But, "Which one proved to be a neighbor?" Jesus is not concerned about what kind of person my neighbor is but . . . what kind of neighbor I am.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: Who Was the Good Neighbor?

Jesus' parable would have hit His original listeners like a blow to the heart, and unless we modern-day readers catch certain cultural nuances, we'll miss the full force of Jesus' message.

Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, foreign conquest scattered the Jews all across the ancient Near East. Many remained in Jerusalem, while others gathered in Samaria.

The Jews in Jerusalem, however, held prejudices against the Samaritans and often regarded them with hostility. The Jews considered Samaritans half-breeds because they intermarried with foreigners (see [Nehemiah 13:23–27](#)) and viewed their worship as artificial because they built their *own* temple and didn't worship at the *true* temple in Jerusalem (see [John 4:20](#)).

How does this cultural context enhance our understanding of Jesus' parable, especially regarding the Samaritan's behavior?

In a twist of irony, the despised foreigner proved to be the good neighbor! In your own words, summarize Jesus' main point of this parable. How does this point relate to the discussion between Jesus and the legal expert in [Luke 10:25–29](#)? Feel free to use your [Bible study tools](#) for help.²



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The Samaritan saw what others did not see because of the man he was. To me, that is the message of the story. What you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus didn't tell the legal expert that being a good neighbor merits eternal life. Quite the opposite! Jesus flipped that idea on its head and taught that mercy and compassion are *signs* of having received eternal life, not *requirements* for entering eternal life. Being a good neighbor naturally flows out of our connection with God.



Correlation: Neighborly Compassion

Neighborly compassion characterized Jesus' ministry from His original call of the disciples until His glorious resurrection. In *Matthew 14:13–21*, Jesus acted like a good neighbor, not just to one, but to *five thousand!*

According to *14:14–15*, how did Jesus react to seeing the crowd? What did the disciples want to do with the crowd? How did these responses differ?

According to *14:16, 19*, who gave the food to the crowd? What vital lesson do you think Jesus taught here about being a good neighbor?



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Jesus saw the crowd's needs, felt compassion, and responded. These are the kinds of actions that characterize Jesus' followers—that make someone a good neighbor. Let's finally turn to application to discuss how we can be good neighbors in our own situations today.



Application: A People of Compassion

In his application of this passage, Pastor Chuck encourages followers of Jesus today to be like the Samaritan in Jesus' parable—to be a *good* neighbor to those God has placed around us. Pastor Chuck makes this heartfelt plea:

I would love it if we were known as people of compassion.

First, look up the word *compassion*. Summarize the definition you find. How can showing compassion to others provide us with an opportunity of sharing with them the good news about Jesus?

Compassion won't just sit there and be quiet, it accelerates a number of very important steps toward the person to whom your heart goes out. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Who are the people God has placed in your life who are *hard* to love? What would it look like for you to be a good neighbor despite these feelings?



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In His infinite wisdom, Jesus has taken the attention away from the characters in the parable and moved the focus toward our own hearts, compelling us to ask, “Am I a good neighbor?” Indeed, Jesus proved to be the *best* neighbor by dying in our place. As we fill our lives with gratitude for that sacrifice, Christlike, neighborly compassion is bound to overflow toward those around us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for being a God of compassion. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for my sins, even though I deserved no such act of grace. I ask You to help me see the needs of my neighbors so I can serve them with the kind of compassion You’ve shown me time and again. Help me be a good neighbor. I pray in Jesus’ compassionate name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.” This page provides you an introduction to four important skills in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.
2. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck’s favorite Bible dictionary is *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*. A variety of versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.

