

# Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

*Won't You Be  
My Neighbor?*

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”

*Luke 10:27*

*2024 WHFMS PROGRAM KIT*





# Contents

<b>Won't You Be My Neighbor? A Good Samaritan Reflection</b> Karen Hall .....	1
<b>Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: Installation Service</b> Ethelene Hughes .....	2
<b>Loving God</b> Palma Neal .....	4
<b>Loving Your Neighbor as Yourself</b> Verna Qualls .....	7
<b>Loving Experts (and Law-Making Leaders)</b> Janelle Walsh .....	12
<b>Loving the Hurting</b> Cheryl Harris .....	16
<b>Loving Criminals</b> Karen Hall .....	20
<b>Loving Priests</b> Pam Buchanan .....	25
<b>Loving Levites</b> Cheryl Harris .....	30
<b>Loving the Samaritans</b> Karen Hall.....	34
<b>Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: Women's Sunday Program</b> Beth Larkin .....	40
<b>Week of Prayer</b> Pat Havener .....	44

## **Love Your Neighbor as Yourself**

WHFMS Program Kit 2024

Published by Advent Christian General Conference  
Office of Women's Ministries

PO Box 690848, Charlotte, NC 28227  
(704) 545-6161 • [www.acgc.us](http://www.acgc.us)



# Won't You Be My Neighbor? A Good Samaritan Reflection

*Karen Hall*

Dear Neighbor,

We all remember watching Mr. Rogers as he visited with our children through the television. He would come in singing the song “Won't You Be My Neighbor?” For us as adults, the show was a little too sweet, but our children were enthralled. And, as adults, we relaxed a little and listened to Mr. Rogers share about the people in his neighborhood and the everyday occurrences there.

In 2019, the movie “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” based on Fred Rogers’ life was released. The story, shared from the perspective of a reporter who interviewed him for an article for Esquire magazine, starred Tom Hanks. Interestingly, the reporter did not really want to like Mr. Rogers. Indeed, he was expecting to find that under that cardigan and smile was a man who was just trying to get ahead like the rest of the world. Instead, he found ... well, I certainly don't want to tell you more about the movie in case you want to see it sometime.

Surely, by now you are wondering why, in the president's letter welcoming you to the 2024 Program Kit, I am going on about Fred Rogers. So, let me get on with my letter. This year's kit is different from any other I have been involved in helping to write. The entire kit is based on the parable of the good Samaritan and focuses on the individual characters in the story.

It truly blessed me and also challenged me as I considered the actions of each character and realized that, at some point in my life, I have been each one of those people! While I am not proud of the fact that I have acted like the priest or even the criminal more often than the Good Samaritan, I don't think I am alone in that realization. So, prepare to be challenged and encouraged.

Hopefully, we will all be better neighbors because of what we learn together this year. After all, this is the essence of the second commandment of Jesus. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Fred Rogers would approve. More importantly, Jesus would.

Love each of you,  
Karen

# Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: Installation Service

*Ethelene Hughes*

**PURPOSE:** In this program, we will install our WHFMS officers for the year.

**MUSIC:** The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration #284 - “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:25-35. Installing our officers is an act of love for each other.

**PREPARATION:** Recommend you either make your individual letters for L-O-V-E-S or purchase them from a craft store. Also, have copies of the song, “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” with the words. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**SHARE:** Our theme for 2024 is “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself (Won’t You Be My Neighbor?)”

The theme verse is Luke 10:27, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (NLT). This Scripture gives us simple guidelines on how we are to love and respect each other as we work together and do God’s will for our society.

Ask the officers to stand up front together (including Spiritual Life Chairman).

**Say:** Today, we will consider some characteristics of good leaders. We’ll also look at how we can practice treating each other like we would like to be treated, with lots of love, and how to be godly examples for our ladies’ group. For some of us, it may not be easy to outwardly show love, but we must follow God’s commandment to love one another and strive to show it as much as possible.

**Madam President:** “L” is the first letter in **LOVES** and it stands for **leader**.

Your role calls for paying special attention to details, being prepared, being mindful of your ladies’ time and being sensitive to their needs. You will be responsible for conducting the meeting and keeping the group on task. Being prepared and organized will make your leadership better. Respond with love in all areas of keeping on task and respecting the time of all your members.

**Madam Vice President:** The letter “O” stands for **offer**. You are the support person



behind the president. How you offer your support shows love for your leader. You need to always be willing to step in when needed. Ask God to help you be strong and be prepared to offer your help whenever the opportunity arises.

**Madam Secretary:** The letter “V” is for **victorious**. You are to keep accurate records and share the past victories your organization has accomplished. These records help your group hear about all the love they have shared as a group. Your willingness to do this position shows the love you have for serving others. Hearing what has been accomplished encourages the group to love being a part of such a wonderful group.

**Madam Treasurer:** The letter “E” stands for **exact**. You keep accurate records and report all transactions back to the group. Your willingness to serve shows just how much you love your mission group, and God sees this and will bless you for it. It is important to have exact records, and our prayer is for you to continue doing this important job for your mission group.

**Spiritual Life Chairman:** The letter “S” stands for **spiritual**, which you show in all your teachings and devotions you share. You help our group demonstrate Luke 10:27 “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” How powerful that Scripture is! You help us to show others love wherever we go.

**To The Members:** The love we are talking about is for all of us. We are truly blessed to know of God’s love, and it is our responsibility to show it to our officers, by supporting them, praying for them and loving them. It is so important to let them know how much they are appreciated and loved. We are the Lord’s organization, and he will help us do his work. Installing our officers is an act of love for each other.

**Optional:** Sing together “They Will Know We Are Christians by our Love.”

**Close in Prayer.**

**Shared by:** Ethelene Hughes, a retired dental hygienist of 45 years who lives with J. D., her husband of 53 years. She is the mother of Joey and Christina, grandmother of Patrick, Libby, Braedon and Paige, and a member of Banner Chapel AC Church in Benson, N.C. She is presently president of the Southern Region WHFMS, which allows her to participate on the WHFMS National Board. She loves being active in her local church ministries, sings in the choir and supports local and conference WHFMS. She also loves spending time with her family and traveling with her husband.

# Loving God

*Palma Neal*

**PURPOSE:** This program is written to help us understand that loving God must be our number one priority. As a result of loving God first, we are then led to loving others as an outcome of that love.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:27; Deuteronomy 6:5; 1 John 4:19; Ephesians 2:8-9; Psalm 34:22; Psalm 136:23-24; Luke 4:8; Psalm 42:1; Luke 10:39; Psalm 40:8

**PREPARATION:** Ask ahead of time for each expected participant to bring her purse, or another important item, with her. Have paper and pencils available, and Bible references should be written on slips of paper and distributed for participants to read at given times.

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles available for those who need one, and assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother.

## Hook

The following activity is suggested as an ice-breaker or introduction to the lesson. Ask everyone in attendance to look in their purses and find the item that is the most important thing inside. Go around and let each person “show and tell” about the item and why it is important to her. Encourage each one to tell why she chose the item and how her life would be different without it. You may give some limitations (such as, no credit cards, money, house keys). You may even announce prior to the meeting to bring an item from home that is of great importance to share.

## Book

Read the theme verse – (NIV for all Scriptures) Luke 10:27 and Deuteronomy 6:5

As we saw in the opening activity, we all have things we cherish and think are impossible to live without. We could say we “love” these things. Luke 10:27 explains the extent of how we are admonished to love God, “...with ALL your heart, ALL your soul, ALL your strength, ALL your mind.” That seems to say to me, “Love with your whole being!”

**ASK:** Why do we love God?

**READ:** 1 John 4:19



We love him because he loved us first. Even in our sin, he loved us. Even when we were unlovable, he loved us. Even when we could not save ourselves, he loved us and died for us.

Other reasons that may be shared and discussed if participants do not share their own reasons.

He redeemed us.

**READ:** Ephesians 2:8-9

He reconciled us.

**READ:** Psalm 34:22

He rescued us.

**READ:** Psalm 136:23-24

**ASK:** How do we love God?

Ways we love God that can be shared and discussed if others do not share.

We worship him.

**READ:** Luke 4:8

We want him.

**READ:** Psalm 42:1; Luke 10:39

We walk with him.

**READ:** Psalm 40:8

## **Look**

On a piece of paper, have participants complete the statement: I love God because....

I love God because of the times he surrounded me with his strong arms and gave me strength beyond my own. During my childhood and teen years, I lived with inward feelings of inferiority. I pushed to overcome but learned that it was only through the strength I received from praying that I could rise above the negative thoughts. Whether I was in school, at church or when singing or playing the piano, prayer became a regular habit. God always strengthened me to accomplish the task. The best? The greatest? No, but enough and beyond what I needed.

It was through these times of prayer that I learned to love him more. Time spent in conversation and waiting for his answer, assurance from previous experiences when he always gave extra strength and promises that he would always be with me are examples of times that knowing him caused me to love him even more. And now in my later adult years, the assurance and promises are even more precious as I have entered a new phase of my life.

Ask if others would like to share what they wrote.

Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote a song several years ago that says in the chorus, “Loving God, loving each other; And the story never ends.” Our story begins with loving God and it continues with loving others as our theme verse indicates. Loving God is a continual process and is revealed through our love for others. One does not stop and the other begins. They run concurrently.

In our closing prayer, I ask you to commit to using the ways and reasons we have discussed today in order to show God your love for him.

**PRAYER:** Pray prayers of commitment by any who choose.

**Shared by:** Palma Neal, Lenoir, N.C., attended Berkshire Christian College and graduated from Fayetteville State University with a degree in elementary education. She taught 25 years before retiring in 2013, after which she continued as a substitute teacher until 2020. She and her late husband, Ed, served in ministry for nearly 52 years. She is the mother of two sons and Nana to three grandchildren.

# Loving Your Neighbor as Yourself

*Verna Qualls*

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this program is to learn how to love and value others and to see the homeless through the eyes of Christ.

**MUSIC:** (Hymns of Heritage & Hope) “Let Your Heart be Broken” #540. If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:27 “The man answered, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. And, love your neighbor as yourself.’” (See also: Luke 19:10 and Matthew 25:35-40).

**PREPARATION Needed:**

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles available for those who need one, and assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother.

## Hook

**The author of this devotional shares the following true stories and insights from her years of ministry.**

She looked like your everyday tourist getting ready to check out of the hotel that we also were staying at. Summer clothes, blond hair pulled up in a high ponytail with strands of pretty pink hairs weaving in and out. She was about our daughter Lisa’s age.

I asked her if she was checking out. She sighed and said she was. I studied her face and asked what was wrong. She burst into tears so I quickly hugged her. She cried for a bit. Then I asked her if she was homeless. She said no that she was living in her car. (To myself, “Honey, that would be called homeless.”) We talked a bit longer.

It got me thinking of the face of the homeless. So much on the news is about the homeless and what needs to be done. Some say it is society’s responsibility to fix it, others say this is the life they have chosen, and so on. We first have to look into the heart of the homeless situation. There are so many facets and none can be lumped together.

Four years ago, we opened our fellowship hall with 40 cots to bring in women during the months of December to March, through the coldest weather. We bussed them, fed them

well, visited with them and loved on them. Volunteers from other churches and the city came; 120 in all served, cleaned, spent the nights, etc. It was a great team effort.

How did these women become homeless? I am not an expert on homelessness, but I have found that things fall into three basic categories - unfaithful family, death and abuse - and each category needs to be addressed.

The first year when I came in to cook breakfast, there were three to four women putting on makeup and getting nicely dressed. One worked at Western, one as an accountant and one in retail. This was not my picture of homelessness.

Let me introduce you to a sweet 82-year-old who stood in the middle of the cots with her pretty pink coat and little hat. She was about 5'3". She had a lost look on her face, so Rick asked if he could help her. She answered that she did not know what to do; she had never done this before. Her story was that she had been living well all her life in a penthouse lifestyle. She had become unable to manage her finances. Her children got power of attorney and vowed to care for her. Six months later, much of her belongings were put outside the apartment, and locks were changed. Her children had not paid her bills.

A young woman came to us on December 1 and stayed with us through the end of February. Her story was different, but had the same ending. Her husband died in June leaving no life insurance or provision. She and the children slept in the car until it got too cold. She worked, but not enough to pay rent. While she was staying with us, agencies were able to work for her, and, in the last week of February, they found her a place rent-free until she could get on her own.

Next, meet a vivacious woman, a hard worker, but homeless. Her story? She was physically abused and had to flee with only her car. Living in her car until it got too cold, she was broken and weary, and her life was changed forever. After a few months of rest and healing, she hit the pavement and got a good job. Soon after, she would be able to afford an apartment. In the meantime, she parked in our church parking lot for safety.

This woman had her child taken away until she could afford an apartment to house him, due to the fact that he had special needs. She diligently worked two jobs with the goal of getting her son back and being able to support him. I remember the morning that she was so excited that she had raised enough to pay the first and last month's rent. She was on her way to apply for additional aid. That night she came in with great sobbing and tears, almost hysterical. They told her she made too much money for aid!!! She could not make it without additional aid. I went to bed that night wondering why people seemed to

be punished for trying to get out of their homelessness. Shouldn't they be rewarded? No wonder some don't try.

We didn't see her after that night; we became so discouraged. I could go on, but I am hoping to paint a clearer picture of the homeless. There are men and women out there who, by so many different circumstances, have found themselves in situations they never deemed possible.

## Book

**Read:** Luke 10:27; Luke 19:10 and Matthew 25:35-40

The second part of Luke 10:27 says to love our neighbor as ourselves. Yet, 2 Timothy 3:2 says that men will be lovers of themselves. Paul is being critical here. But doesn't Jesus say to love ourselves?

There is also a Greek word for love meaning a deep friendship. This word in Greek is "*Philia*." Throughout our lives, we can have many friends that this *philia* implies. Yet, they may not be lasting. Through moves, arguments and other troubles, this kind of love can be betrayed, crushed and temporal.

**Discuss** how *philia* can only take us so far in loving others.

**Ask:** Have you been disappointed by this kind of love?

I would say this love is conditional.

These two are not the 'love' that Jesus is talking about. In fact, just the opposite.

## AGAPE LOVE

To answer this, we must look at the Greek word for love. The Greek word for "love" in Luke 10:27 is: "*agape*" love. The definition for *agape* love is the fatherly love of God for humans, as well as the reciprocal love for God. In Scripture, the transcendent *agape* love is the highest form of love.

God's love toward us is "*Agape* love, the highest form of love. To love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, is to return that *agape* love back to him. When we have that kind of love, we are content, confident and secure in God's (*agape*) love. Therefore, we have need of nothing because God supplies all our needs. With this kind of love, we can and are able to give this *agape* love to others. Without it, we can't love unconditionally. Our love can only take us so far. So, when we have and understand God's unconditional love for us, we can now take that love we have been given and love our neighbor as ourselves.

In 1 John 4:7, The Greek word for love is also *agape*. “Beloved, let us love (agape) one another.” First Corinthians is all about *agape* love. When Jesus says to love others as we love ourselves, he is saying that, as God has loved us, and we return that love to him, we can now take the love that we have been given and bestow it on others.

**READ** 1 Corinthians 13

**Discuss** how we can apply it to (*agape*) loving ourselves and others.

I would say this love is God’s perfect love.

## Look

**ASK:** Can you think of a time when you have experienced *agape* love?

**ASK:** When you walk past a homeless person, what do you feel or see? Is it disgust, pity, compassion, judgment or nothing?

**ASK:** From the story, what are some of the reasons people become homeless?

**ASK:** Have we considered these reasons or just lumped the homeless all into one basket?

**ASK:** How could we work at overcoming that mentality if that is what we have?

**ASK:** How does the *agape* love that we are talking about fit into this community?

The only way that we can love on these people is to be able to have the love of God so richly in us that we can pass it on to others. However, it is important to have love but also discernment. We pray and ask the Lord to lead us or bring us those who want and need out of this lifestyle. Sadly, there are many who like being homeless and living off others. We always need compassion, but when we feel inspired to help, we can drain our energy and resources by helping those who are unwilling to change. It is difficult.

**DISCUSS:** What are your thoughts on the comment I just shared?

We had one case where a family called and asked for food at a hotel. Rick quickly went and bought KFC for them. When he got to the hotel, there were piles of food from different restaurants. They were draining our resources used to help others. They were embarrassed because the kids were supposed to meet Rick at the door and take the food. One child let him all the way in.

Solution? Churches in the area banded together to call each other if they had already



served a specific family. We are on a list with the community, so, when there is a family in need, we are called to see if we can meet the need. If we can't, then another resource is called. This wisdom, discernment and compassion have worked well.

## Took

**ASK:** What are some ways we can put this lesson into action?

Here are some suggestions:

- Pray for opportunities
- Look for opportunities
- Keep an ear open for opportunities

Following are some words of caution. Unless the Lord seriously prompts you, don't let someone stay in your home. If it is cold out, pay for someone to stay in a hotel or hostel or find places that take people in. Also, homeless people who stand on street corners are often in a community run by a leader who takes a share of their earnings. If you wish to truly help, find ones who are sleeping on a bench, loners. Leave food with them. Seek out those in need. Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. Are we seeking?

Close with prayer.

**Shared by:** Verna Qualls lives and works with her husband, Pastor Rick Qualls, in Bellingham, Washington. They have four children. Verna is a stay-at-home grandma whenever needed by her 13 grandchildren.

# Loving Experts (and Law-Making Leaders)

*Janelle Walsh*

**PURPOSE:** In this lesson, we will seek to learn how to be respectful of lawmakers, even if we disagree with their actions.

**MUSIC:** (Hymns of Heritage & Hope) Make Me a Servant #527. If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:25-29, 36-37; Matthew 22:34-40

**PREPARATION Needed:**

**Skit:** Run off a copy of the opening skit and assign the needed readers. You may choose to make signs for the various characters to wear during the skit. Keep these signs to use in all the other skits.

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles available for those who need one, and assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother.

## Hook

This devotional will focus on loving experts. In the Scripture about the Good Samaritan, this person was probably a lawyer. Luke 10:25 calls him “an expert in the law.” As the Scripture is being read, the characters will act out the reading. At the end of the reading, the character who is the expert will stand and share her part.

Invite the people who are in the skit to go over to the side of the room and come in as their parts are read. If you have a small group, you may ask them to stay seated and just get up and act out their parts as appropriate and then be seated. The person who is acting out the man who is beaten does not have to get on the floor, but may sit in a chair or recline on a couch. The point is to have each person walk by, and then go to the other side.

This devotional will focus on experts or others in authority. At the end of the reading, the character who is the expert will stand and share her part. The narrator may be the one giving the devotional, or it may be someone else. The narrator should read the Scripture slowly enough for the actors to play their roles.

To introduce this lesson, share the skit below: **Loving Experts**

(Luke 10:25-37)

On one occasion an expert in 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.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 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. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out 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.’”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

*The expert will look at the audience and say,*

“I have been amazed listening to this teacher, this man called Jesus. But, I am an expert in the law. His teachings are making me very uncomfortable. People are going to him with their questions now. What if they think he knows more than I do? What if he teaches something I think is wrong?”

“At first, I thought he was a harmless man, but what if he leads others astray? What if he teaches something that makes me look bad? I just don’t know what to do!

“But, when I hear him teach my heart is touched. It’s as if my heart is recognizing a truth that I have never understood. Am I wrong for questioning?”

## Book

In our passage from Luke, the person asking the questions is an expert in the law.

**ASK:** Who are the modern experts in the law? (lawyers, city, county, state and national leaders and politicians)

**ASK:** What does the expert want to know? (how to inherit eternal life)

**ASK:** What does Jesus tell him is the answer? (Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor)

**Read** Matthew 22:34-40

**ASK:** In the Matthew passage, who are the people asking the question? (the Pharisees)

**ASK:** What seems to be their motivation? What did they want to learn? (motivation: test him, learn: what is the greatest commandment)

**ASK:** What does Jesus tell them is the answer? (Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.)

**Say:** “I deeply appreciate the consistency with which we are taught throughout the Bible. Jesus is quoting the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 6. In it, the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land. In verse 5, the recap of how they should live their lives is given.” Read Deuteronomy 6:5.

“Whether we are experts in the law or not, the direction to love the Lord and our neighbor can be acted upon. Let’s take a moment to think about a couple of passages that define love.”

## Look

**Share:**

1 Corinthians 13 gives us a full definition, ending by telling us that love is the greatest of the three: faith, hope and love.

Take a moment to think quietly or to share with the group what aspects of love are easier for you to enact and which one(s) may be the hardest. (Allow time for people to think.)

1 John 3:16-18 also tells us how Jesus showed his love and directs us towards loving ways to share his love with others. What stands out to you?

Verse 18 guides us. “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

## Took

The expert in the law recognized that the neighbor was “the one who had mercy on him.” It’s easy to point at the politicians and lawmakers of today and decide that they are merciless or opposed to the Bible. I’ve been told many times to be careful when I point because three fingers are pointing back at me. When I make an announcement about somebody else, I need to watch that I am also filled with mercy.

**NOTE:** This is not the time to have a political discussion – it is instead a call to offer mercy to those people who have taken significant responsibilities on their shoulders. We are given directions for what we should be doing to support our leaders.

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

**ASK:** What are we called to offer for all people? (petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving)

**ASK:** For whom are we offering these? (kings and all those in authority)

**ASK:** Why? (That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness)

As we leave today, let’s be aware of our attitudes toward the lawmakers. Whether we agree or disagree with their personal or professional decisions, we should still be respectful toward them. We are commanded to pray for them. More importantly, we should be showing Christ’s love to them. Join me in praying for all of the civic leaders.

**Shared by:** Janelle Walsh attends the Princeton (W. Va.) Advent Christian Church where her husband Sam is pastor. Their two adult children and two dachshunds live with them. Janelle is an itinerant music teacher, splitting her time between an intermediate school and an early learning center.

# Loving the Hurting

*Cheryl Harris*

**PURPOSE:** In this lesson, we will seek to learn that the people who are hurting and are most in need of love are right around us and all over the world

**MUSIC:** Hymns of Heritage & Hope #540 “Let Your Heart Be Broken,” #208 “How Deep the Father’s Love,” #3 “All Creatures of Our God and King,” #24 “Be Still My Soul,” “Alive, Alive Forevermore” from Integrity Music or “You Lift Me Up” by The Afters. If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:30-35; 1 John 3:11-15, 16-18

**PREPARATION:**

**Skit:** Run off a copy of the opening skit and assign the needed readers. You may choose to make signs for the various characters to wear during the skit. Keep these signs to use in all the other skits.

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles ready for use. Assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother. Ask someone to have the Scripture 1 John 3:16-18 open to read when asked.

## Hook

This devotional will focus on Loving the Hurting. In the Scripture about the Good Samaritan, this person was the person on the side of the road.

Invite the people who are in the skit to go over to the side of the room and come in as their parts are read. If you have a small group, you may ask them to stay seated and just get up and act out their parts as appropriate and then be seated. The person who is acting out the man who is beaten does not have to get on the floor, but may sit in a chair or recline on a couch. The point is to have each person walk by, and then go to the other side.

This devotional will focus on the hurting. At the end of the reading, the character who is the injured one will stand and share her part. The narrator may be the one giving the devotional or it may be someone else. The narrator should read the Scripture slowly enough for the actors to play their roles.

To introduce this lesson, share the skit below: **Loving the Hurting**



On one occasion an expert in 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.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 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. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out 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.’”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

*The injured man will look at the audience and say,*

“Well, it happened again. No matter where I am, no matter how hard I work, no matter how hard I try, one more time I am beaten down. Is it because I look weak? Is it because I am smaller, or taller, or poorer, or richer? Is it because I am different? Or is it because I just blend in with the crowd so no one notices me at all? I’ve tried fitting in with the rest, but I couldn’t figure out how. I’ve tried being ‘big and bad,’ so people would leave me alone, but obviously there is always someone else who is bigger and meaner. I’ve tried being invisible. I look down rather than at others. I hide my face and never seek attention. Sometimes that works, but I am so lonely. You know it’s really hard to say this, but being

beaten today was almost a blessing. For once, someone came along and was kind to me. Someone noticed me, someone cared.”

## Book

**READ:** 1 John 3:11-15

**ASK:** How do we know that Cain was not loving? (He killed his brother. He was a child of the evil one and did evil things.)

**ASK:** Why does John caution his readers to not be surprised if the world hates them? (Those who follow after the evil one will hate those who are good.)

**ASK:** If it is possible, John gets even blunter saying that if you hate another believer and don't grow in love, you are not saved and will not live eternally.

**READ:** 1 John 3:16-18

**ASK:** What do we understand about love when we learn that Christ gave his life for us? (We must give our lives for other believers.)

**ASK:** How is love shown when it is sincere? (Empty words are not love. Sincere love is shown in our actions.)

## Look

One modern Christian song that I really love from The Afters is titled “You Lift Me Up.” I identify with the song because I am a private person and rarely let others know how much I am hurting. I take it to God, which is the message of the song. However, I have learned a lesson about that through editing this program kit, some wisdom that is NOT reflected in the song. GOD OFTEN USES HIS PEOPLE TO COMFORT AND LIFT EACH OTHER UP. We are called to love and encourage one another throughout God's Word.

**READ** 1 John 3:16-18

**ASK:** Why does John say we are to lay down our lives for and share our possessions with our brothers and sisters? (We are to love our brothers and sisters as Christ loved us. In other words, his sacrifice was not only to restore us to fellowship with the Father, but it was also to teach us how we are to love.)

**ASK:** In what ways are we to love? (We ought to lay down our lives, sometimes literally, but more often our time, and share material possessions with a brother or sister in need. We are NOT to love only with words or speech but also with actions and in truth.)

## Took

**ASK:** How do you respond when you are weak, personally, physically, mentally, socially or emotionally? (Encourage each other as people share their answers. Leader, be prepared to start the sharing if no one volunteers quickly. You can also use the author's testimony below.)

**PERSONAL TESTIMONY:** I have been struggling with my health since 2019. It started with what appeared to be a simple ear infection. Even though the infection went away, the ringing did not. It interfered with my sleep and my ability to hear people. Then COVID threw a wrench into the whole mess. It laid me low for a whole month, and I have never fully regained my stamina since then. I have blamed myself for not trusting God enough for healing, for being too weak and even for crying when it was too much to handle. What I have gained instead of healing (yet) is a new respect for people struggling to find medical answers and a new sympathy for those fighting long-term illnesses.

**ASK:** What helps you the most when you need help? (Some answers may include: a hug, time with a friend or family member, rest, time off or away, a helping hand, etc.)

**ASK:** Who do you know who needs a helping hand or a loving prayer right now? (Allow answers and sharing.)

Encourage all present to pray for each other.

Close with one or more song(s) of your choice. "Bind Us Together" would be a good choice, #426 in Hymns of Heritage & Hope.

**Shared by:** Cheryl Harris lives in a trailer in the woods in Ashland, Maine nearby the school where she works. Her husband, William Harris, has joined her at the school and serves as a bus driver, coach and custodian. They share their home with three pets: their beagle-boxer dog Daisy; clever tuxedo cat Doria; and lovable, fluffy tabby cat Ariel.

# Loving Criminals

*Karen Hall*

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this program is to consider the idea of loving criminals. Who are the people of our day who are criminals? How would Jesus treat these people? How do we treat people who are different from us?

**MUSIC:** From “Hymns of Heritage and Hope, #670 “Are You Able?” (especially stanza 2). If your group does not enjoy singing, you may choose to read the song, especially the second verse.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10: 25-37; Hebrews 13:1-3

**PREPARATION:**

**Skit:** Run off a copy of the opening skit and assign the needed readers. You may choose to make signs for the various characters to wear during the skit. Keep these signs to use in all the other skits.

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles ready for use. Assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother. Ask someone to have the Scripture Hebrews 13:1-3 open to read when asked.

## Hook

Invite the people who are in the skit to go over to the side of the room and come in as their parts are read. If you have a small group, you may ask them to stay seated and just get up and act out their parts as appropriate and then be seated. The person who is acting out the man who is beaten does not have to get on the floor but may sit in a chair or recline on a couch. The point is to have each person walk by, and then go to the other side. This devotional will focus on criminals in the parable of the good Samaritan. As the Scripture is being read, the characters will act out the reading. At the end of the reading, the character who is the criminal will stand and share her part. The narrator may be the one giving the devotional or may be someone else. The narrator should read the Scripture slowly enough for the actors to play their roles.

**SAY:** “Today, I have the privilege of introducing the drama, Loving Criminals.” (Have the skit performed.)

**SKIT: Loving Criminals**

On one occasion an expert in 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.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 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. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out 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.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

*The one who is the robber will look at the audience and say,*

“I know, I know, I’m the bad guy in this story. For absolutely no reason I joined with others and beat a man we didn’t know, took all of his possessions and left him for dead. Do I have an excuse? Not really. I could blame the fact that I grew up hungry and alone. The other robbers took me in and together we formed a family of sorts.

I could tell you it’s because I’m lazy, and just don’t want to work like other people do. I could tell you it’s because I was beaten and abused myself and that’s all I know. Maybe it’s all of those things. Maybe it’s none of those things.

One thing I do know. Watching the other people go right on by the man we beat; well, I realize they're no better than I am! That priest, that Levite, they do a lot of talking but no action!

The Samaritan though, I don't know about him. We all know Samaritans aren't to be trusted. But look what he did.

I just don't know."

## Book

**SAY:** "When we think about Scripture related to criminals we likely do not think first of this parable. We also probably do not think about all the Scriptures telling about Paul or Peter or others being in prison, even though by definition they were 'criminals.'"

**ASK:** What Scripture comes to your mind that mentions criminals or prison?"  
As people share, discuss as appropriate.

One Scripture that is often mentioned is Matthew 25:35-40. If that is not mentioned, read it aloud now. Focus on verse 36:b "I was in prison and you came to me."

**ASK:** Does anyone remember the Scripture leading up to these verses? (Jesus was teaching about the final judgment and he is describing what will be said to the sheep - the ones who are saved.)

**SAY:** In these verses visiting those in prison is just as important as feeding the hungry, giving clothes to the naked, or taking care of strangers. In other words, in God's eyes, taking care of criminals is a part of who we are as Christians.

**READ** Hebrews 13:1-3.

**SAY:** These verses start with the command to let brotherly love continue. The theme fits perfectly with the parable we are studying this year. It goes on to remind us to show hospitality, which was mentioned in the Matthew Scripture we just read. Finally, verse 3 says, 'Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.' Rarely do we consider those in prison as if we are in prison with them. As Christians, we often fail to think of prisoners or criminals like we do other people who are less fortunate.



**ASK:** Why do you think that is? (Allow replies.) Are we behaving the way Scripture instructs us to behave? (Hopefully, they will agree we are not.)

## Look

Share the following statistics with your group.

The prison population in the US is 639 per 100,000 people. (The US makes up 5% of the world's population, but 20% of the world's prison population is incarcerated in the US.)

In 2019, the US had about 2.1 million prisoners in total. That number is slightly less now.

About 10% of prisoners are in federal prisons. There are 110 federal prisons, 1,833 state prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,134 local jails and 80 Indian County jails. On average, 76.6% of released inmates return to prison.

Drug-related offenses make up 46% of the prison population.

Fewer than 40 prisoners are serving sentences for offenses related to National Security. 6.8% of the prison population is female.

**ASK:** Do you find any of these statistics surprising? Allow for discussion.

**SHARE:** As Christians, we may feel hopeless. Maybe we feel afraid to take action. Perhaps we think we have no responsibility since these people are being punished for crimes they have been convicted of committing. All of this may be partially true. But, Scripture tells us we do have a responsibility to these people. What do you think about this responsibility?" Feel free to share your thoughts with the group. Perhaps our responsibility is to help those people who statistically are likely to become criminals.

**ASK:** Is there something we can do as Christian women?

**ASK:** Are there agencies with which we can become involved?

**ASK:** Can we volunteer to tutor children? What else can we do locally?

If we are honest with ourselves, we all know people personally who have either served time in prison or have broken the law and were not convicted. There are no families who have not been affected in some way by criminal behavior.

## Took

**SHARE:** Chuck Colson was an attorney who served a brief time in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal during Richard Nixon's presidency. He became a Christian and wrote several books that are well worth reading. Mr. Colson founded Prison Fellowship after he was released. He often stated, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." This means that no one must work harder than anyone else to be forgiven for their sins, and no one is so good they do not need forgiveness. Prison Fellowship's philosophy is "We believe that Jesus offers hope, healing and a new purpose for each life. He can make even the most broken people and situations whole again, replacing the cycle of crime with a cycle of renewal."

**ASK:** What can we do to be a part of the hope, healing, and new purpose for these people?

While we may feel overwhelmed, we must remember how Jesus responded to those who had broken the law. Even when Jesus was suffering terribly on the cross, he had compassion on the thief who asked for forgiveness. (Luke 23:32-43)

**ASK:** As a group, how can we demonstrate the love Jesus had for criminals?

Years ago, the phrase 'What Would Jesus Do?' became popular. Recently, another phrase has been added to answer that question. 'What would Jesus do? He would love first.' May that be our heart's desire, to love others first.

**Shared by:** Karen Hall has been a member of WHFMS all her adult life. She had the privilege of serving as the national president for nine years. Writing this program was a difficult one she says, because it opened her eyes to the times she has not behaved as the Good Samaritan. Karen and her husband, David, live at the Advent Christian Village, in Dowling Park, Florida.

# Loving Priests

*Pam Buchanan*

**PURPOSE:** This lesson will emphasize that God’s people, whether Jews or Christians, are called to be God’s priests every day, serving him by loving others, as our holy calling.

**MUSIC:** All from “Hymns of Heritage and Hope” – “I Will Serve Thee” (#515); “Channels Only” (#518); “Make Me a Blessing” (#520); Make Me a Servant (#527). If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:25-35 (emphasis on vs. 31); Matthew 5:17; Matthew 22:37-40; Exodus 19:4-6; 1 Peter 2:9

## **PREPARATION:**

**Skit:** Run off a copy of the opening skit and assign the needed readers. You may choose to make signs for the various characters to wear during the skit. Keep these signs to use in all the other skits.

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles ready for use. Assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother. Ask someone to have the Scripture Hebrews 13:1-3 open to read when asked.

## **Hook**

Invite the people who are in the skit to go over to the side of the room and come in as their part is read. If you have a small group, you may ask them to stay seated and just get up and act out their parts as appropriate and then be seated. The person who is acting out the man who is beaten does not have to get on the floor but may sit in a chair or recline on a couch. The point is to have each person walk by, and then go to the other side.

This devotional will focus on priests. In this passage of Scripture from Luke 10, we do not have much information about the Priest. We do know that priests were supposed to be holy men of God, and thus were respected and esteemed. As we begin our lesson, listen carefully as the Scripture is being read. At the end of the passage, let’s then imagine what the priest might say to us as he tries to explain his actions that day.

As the Scripture is read, the characters will act out the reading. At the end of the reading, the character who is the priest will stand and share her part. The narrator may be the one giving the devotional or may choose someone else. The narrator should read the Scripture slowly enough for the actors to play their roles.

## SKIT TIME: **Loving Priests**

On one occasion an expert in 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.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 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. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out 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.’”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

*The one who is the priest will look at the audience and say:*

“Don’t look at me that way! I know I’m a priest and supposed to be always doing what is right, but sometimes that just isn’t possible! Yes, I saw that man that had been beaten, but I was in a hurry. You see, there was this function at the synagogue that was very, very important. As the priest, I had to be there and could not be late! If I stopped to help this man I didn’t know, I would have missed this meeting. Besides, I am a priest! I can’t go around touching people’s dirty bodies! What if he had some illness? What if I got sick from him? Then I couldn’t help all the other people I’m supposed to help!”

“Frankly, when I saw him, I thought he might be just a drunk. You know good people don’t usually get beaten up and left on the side of the road. I wonder what he did wrong that made that happen to him?”

“Oh, don’t look at me that way! You know your Bible says you are all priests if you claim to know Jesus! You’re just as responsible as I am!”

(Thank the actors and give everyone time to return to their seats.)

After the reading of the skit, ask the ladies to discuss by answering the following question:  
**ASK:** What were the excuses he gave for his actions? (I was in a hurry, I had an important function to perform, I can’t go around touching people’s dirty bodies. If I did, then I would be “unclean” and couldn’t help others. And I might get sick myself!)

**ASK:** What were his judgments of the man who had been beaten? (This man might just be a drunk and he might have deserved this “beating.”)

**ASK:** What was his defense? (I am a Priest, but so are you. You are just as responsible as I am.)

**ASK:** What are your own personal reactions to his possible excuses, judgments and/or defense?

## Book

The biblical priesthood was established by God in the Old Testament. A priest was required to act as a mediator/ambassador of God. He was a chosen vessel to represent God to the people.

In the Old Testament, the priest represented “the Law,” but we read in the New Testament that Jesus came to “fulfill the law,” and he added the new commandment of love.

**READ** the words of Jesus from Matthew 5:17... “Do not think that I have come to abolish Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

**READ** the words of Jesus from Matthew 22:37-40... “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Love is not about an emotional feeling, but about acting in a specific way toward others that is consistent with the fulfillment of the commands given in the law. Jesus is love, and loving others is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law.

And, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we are all referred to as “priest.”

**READ** Exodus 19:4-6 and 1 Peter 2:9. These two passages explain our responsibility of being priests in our society today and representing the love of God to the world around us.

## Look

As we examine the application of this lesson to our lives, let’s return to Luke 10:31. The verse tells us that this priest “saw the man,” but he passed by on the other side. He made a choice to continue on his way and fulfill his temple duties rather than do the right thing by helping this man.

**ASK:** How is this same temptation present in our lives today?

**ASK:** How do we struggle with allowing our “church” commitments to get in the way of “loving our neighbor?”

**ASK:** As members of the “royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” how can we represent our God to our own communities?

## Took

We can all imagine that this priest from Luke 10:31 was later convicted of his actions that day and repented. We can all imagine that this priest learned from his wrong choice and changed his ways. And, we all have the opportunity to learn from his example and make “loving the Lord our God by loving our neighbor” a priority and a goal in our own lives.

**ASK:** Can you think of any “present-day” examples of this parable happening in our world today?

**ASK:** What are some practical steps we can take in “loving our neighbor as ourselves.”  
CLOSE WITH A SONG OF YOUR CHOICE AND PRAYER TOGETHER.

**Shared by:** Pam Buchanan lives in a cottage on the Blowing Rock AC Campground with her husband, Rev. Rob Buchanan. She attends the Blue Ridge AC Chapel and serves as

the Appalachian Regional WHFMS president. Pam is thankful for the extra time in these retirement years to travel — to visit her mom, her children and especially her only grandchild, Clara Noel (born in December 2021).



# Loving Levites

*Cheryl Harris*

**PURPOSE:** In this lesson, we will seek to learn what is wrong with our hearts that we resent Levites (who collect tithes).

**MUSIC:** (Hymns of Heritage & Hope) #634 “Trust & Obey,” #401 “Love Lifted Me,” and #620 “Take Me Life and Let It Be” If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:32; Mark 10:17-29

**PREPARATION** Needed:

**Skit:** Run off a copy of the opening skit and assign the needed readers. You may choose to make signs for the various characters to wear during the skit. Keep these signs to use in all the other skits.

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles ready for use. Assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother. Ask someone to have the Scripture Hebrews 13:1-3 open to read when asked.

## Hook

This devotional will focus on Loving Levites. In the Scripture about the Good Samaritan, we do not have much information on him. He was simply called a Levite. As the Scripture is being read the characters will act out the reading. At the end of the reading the character who is the Levite will stand and share her part.

To introduce this lesson, share the skit below: **Loving Levites**

(Luke 10:25-37)

On one occasion an expert in 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.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 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. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out 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.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

*The one who is the Levite will look at the audience and say,*

“Do you know who I am? I’m a Levite. We are special because we are descendants of the tribe of Levi. Only Levites can ever become priests. We are indeed blessed. We have important jobs in the tabernacle and in the community. We are special! I saw that man who was there on the side of the road, and I felt so sorry for him. But I saw the priest walk on by, so I knew I shouldn’t stop. The priest always knows the right thing to do. Besides, the priest is more responsible than me! He’s much higher ranking than I am. I’m just a Levite, he’s a priest. If the priest had stopped, I would have been honored to stop and help the priest. Besides, I knew SOMEBODY would stop! I just didn’t have time! I can’t do everything you know!

## **Book**

Comparing Bible versions often yields interesting information. The key verse for the Levite man — Luke 10:32 — is very short in most versions. I found the variations provided some useful pieces of information. Different translators do bring out unique points. The basic text tells that when the Levite approached the injured man, he saw him but kept his distance as he continued on his way. My favorite translation was the VOICE, which reads, “Then a Levite who was on his way to assist in the temple also came and saw the victim lying there, and he too kept his distance.”

Is being a servant in the temple reason enough for a Levite to not help a hurting person? Let's explore.

**READ** Numbers 1:47.

**ASK:** What does God make clear to Moses about Levites here? What couldn't they do? What were they supposed to do instead? (They are not to serve in the army. Instead, God specifically ordained them to be in charge of the Ark of the Covenant and all that went with it. They were also responsible to assist in temple worship with sacrifices, grain offerings, musical tasks, bookkeeping tasks and more.)

**READ** Numbers 3:5-13.

**ASK:** What does God say the Levites are to do? (They were given to Aaron and his sons to serve the priests. They were not priests – a later issue God had to settle – but served the priests.)

## Look

**READ** Exodus 32:25-29.

**ASK:** What problem among the Israelites was Moses addressing here? (Aaron had let the people get out of control, and they had become laughingstocks.)

**ASK:** When Moses called for all who loved the Lord to come to him, who answered, and what did Moses ask them to do? (The Levites answered, and Moses asked them to take up swords and kill all who refused to stand for God.)

This loyalty from the Levites is what led to their service in the temple. Originally, all Israelite firstborns were designated as the ones to serve in the temple, but God sets up a new set of temple servants here. The ones who chose God became God's chosen servants. As such, they had no land inheritance because God was their inheritance. (Many pastoral families today still understand this concept, first dealing with owning their own homes or property at retirement.)

## Took

We have seen that Levites were helpers in the temple. They were not priests but helped the priests. Thus, they also had to be pure for service in the Lord's House.

**ASK:** How has God called you to serve in his house?

**ASK:** Who has God called you to care for, to love?

As we travel through life, there are many joys and sorrows. Sometimes, we reach our destinations with no delays. Other times, we are delayed by an accident. Sometimes, we don't make it all.

**ASK:** How has God called you to help others on this journey of life?

Close with one or more song(s) of your choice and prayer together.

**Shared by:** Cheryl Harris lives in a trailer in the woods in Ashland, Maine nearby the school where she works. Her husband, William Harris, has joined her at the school and serves as a bus driver, coach, and custodian. They share their home with three pets, their beagle-boxer dog Daisy, clever tuxedo cat Doria and lovable, fluffy tabby cat Ariel.

# Loving the Samaritans

*Karen Hall*

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this program is to consider who the Samaritans were in Jesus's time. Who are the people of our day who are treated as Samaritans? How would Jesus treat these people? How do we treat people who are different from us?

**MUSIC:** (Hymns of Heritage & Hope) "Let the Beauty of Jesus be Seen in Me" #600. If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10: 25-37 and John 4: 4-9, 16-18, 27.

**PREPARATION:**

**Skit:** Run off a copy of the opening skit and assign the needed readers. You may choose to make signs for the various characters to wear during the skit. Keep these signs to use in all the other skits.

**Music:** If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Have Bibles available for those who need one, and assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother.

Print the attached worksheet and make copies for each person. If that is not possible then either a chalkboard or a whiteboard may be used with the worksheet information written on it. Do not give out the worksheet or show the board until later in the program.

## Devotional

Invite the people who are in the skit to go over to the side of the room and come in as their part is read. If you have a small group, you may ask them to stay seated and just get up and act out their parts as appropriate and then be seated. The person who is acting out the man who is beaten does not have to get on the floor but may sit in a chair or recline on a couch. The point is to have each person walk by, and then go to the other side.

This devotional will focus on Samaritans. In the Scripture about the Good Samaritan, we know that he was a man of compassion. A Samaritan was considered someone to avoid. As the Scripture is read, the characters will act out the reading. At the end of the reading, the character who is the Samaritan will stand and share her part. The narrator may be the one giving the devotional or may choose someone else. The narrator should read the Scripture slowly enough for the actors to play their roles.

## Hook

Say: “Today, I have the privilege of introducing the drama, “Loving Samaritans.” (Have the skit performed.)

### SKIT: **Loving Samaritans**

On one occasion an expert in 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.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 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. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out 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.’”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

*The one who is the Samaritan will look at the audience and say,*

“I know what it is like to be looked down upon. Growing up a Samaritan, I was taught about our God and know about his commands. I also have known prejudice and hatred.

Sometimes, it has made me bitter and angry. Sometimes I just shake my head and try to move past the injustice my people have endured.

When I saw the man on the side of the road, though, I just couldn't walk away. He was covered in so much blood; I first thought he must be dead. Was I tempted to walk on by? Yes, for a brief second, I thought I could pretend I didn't see him. But I couldn't. He was so injured, so helpless, so in need of someone, anyone to help.

When I got to him, I wasn't sure what to do. What if I hurt him by moving him? What if people saw me and thought I was the one who beat him? But I had no choice. While I couldn't do everything, I did what I could with what I had. I hope the oil, wine and bandages made him feel better. I'm counting on the innkeeper to take care of him now. I'll be heading back to check on him as soon as I can.

I do hope he will be alright.

(Thank the actors and give everyone time to return to their seats.)

## Book

Give out the worksheet or uncover the board.

**Say:** "The Scriptures in today's devotional are very familiar to us. As we look at them now though, let us look at them from a different perspective." (Discuss the first two questions on the worksheet. Accept the answers and thank the members for their participation.)

**Say:** "The next Scripture is from the story of the woman at the well. Unlike the Good Samaritan parable, this is the recording of an actual event. This Scripture is also very familiar to us. For our devotional today, we are focusing on the aspects of who the woman was, so parts of the Scripture are left out." (Ask someone to read the Scriptures as presented.)

**Say:** "Let's look at the questions together." (Discuss the questions. The answers are not difficult, but the women may need a few seconds to consider them. Do not rush, but also do not wait for extended periods of time.)

**Question 2** asks what three strikes the woman has against her. The strikes are: she is a Samaritan, she is a woman, and she has been married five times and is now living with a man who is not her husband.



**Question 3** has many answers so allow discussion time, make sure one of the answers is that he knew he would meet this woman and he loved her dearly.

**Question 4** has many potential answers. Encourage the women to look broadly. The “Samaritans” in our world may be people of a different race or religion, but also people who are illegal immigrants, different cultures, different political views, or people with disabilities. Our world seems to be increasingly divided into “groups” and we Christians have bought into that division.

**Question 5** may take a political turn. That is fine, as long as the discussion recognizes that Jesus did not agree with everyone, but he loved them and treated them humanely. We must do the same.

## Look

**Say:** “Every day, we come across people who are unique. Some are different in the ways mentioned. Some just have different personalities, so we find them difficult to be around. How do we respond? The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is a perfect example of how Jesus chose to live and what the disciples thought. John said they ‘Marveled that he was talking to a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you seek?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’ Possibly because they had already been with Jesus long enough to know that he truly loved everyone and sought out those who needed him, despite their differences.

As we go about our day-to-day lives how do we treat others? Is it with love and compassion? In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the ‘bad guys’ were the ones who crossed to the other side of the road. The ‘bad guys’ were the ones who represented the church of that day. The Jews were smug in their treatment of Samaritans. They felt justified in their prejudice. We look at them and think how wrong they were, but aren’t we often the same? Whenever we treat people differently, judge them more harshly, or avoid them because of the differences we perceive, we are “crossing to the other side of the road.”

## Took

**Say:** “In a moment I will ask us to put this program into action. You will not be asked to share your answers out loud. First, we will stop and pray. As you pray silently, ask God to reveal all the times you have acted like the Priest, the Levite, or even one of the robbers in the parable. Ask God to reveal to you the prejudices you have hidden even from yourself. We all have them. Ask God for his forgiveness and ask him to change your heart to be more like the Good Samaritan. Ask God to help you recognize what you can do to make a difference.

Now, as a group what can we do to be welcoming to people different from us? Are we truly kind and loving to those people who we believe are different? Over the next few weeks let us think about our group. Are we exclusive in our group and our relationships? As we move forward pray that each decision made, each word said and each plan implemented will truly represent the love that Jesus we are called to have for everyone.”

Close with prayer.

**Shared by:** Karen Hall has been a member of WHFMS all her adult life. She had the privilege of serving as the national president for nine years. Writing this program was a difficult one she says, because it opened her eyes to the times she has not behaved as the Good Samaritan. Karen and her husband, David, live at the Advent Christian Village, in Dowling Park, Florida.

## Loving Samaritans Worksheet

1. Had you considered before how the Samaritan may have felt as he ministered to someone who had perhaps treated him badly? Do you think he may have had other feelings other than the ones he expressed in the skit?
2. In this parable Jesus could have used anyone as an example of a good neighbor. Why do you think he chose to use a Samaritan?

John 4:4-9

And he [Jesus] had to pass through Samaria. So, he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so, Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well, it was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

John 4:16-18

Jesus said to her,  
"Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband," Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband;' for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

John 4:27

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"

1. Why do you think Jesus made a point of going through Samaria?
2. In the story of the woman at the well this woman had three strikes against her. What were they?
3. Why did Jesus choose to put himself in this situation?
4. Who are the Samaritans in our world today?
5. Do we have to agree with a person to treat them in a loving manner?

# Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: Women's Sunday Program

*Beth Larkin*

**PURPOSE:** This lesson is a sermon for a Women's Sunday service.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:25-37

**PREPARATION:** If your Women's Sunday program involves the women taking over the Sunday service, make sure to enlist and prepare the women for roles they will fill, whether they are service attendants or sharing parts of the message that follows. You will also need to choose service music; suggestions follow.

**Suggested Music:** *Hymns of Heritage & Hope:* Call to Worship (419); "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (1); "At Calvary" (331); "Our God Has Made Us One" (427); Blest Be The Tie That Binds (429)

*Public Domain:* "Beloved, Let Us Love One Another (1 John 4:7+8);" "This Is My Commandment;" "I Bless You in the Name of Jesus, Brother"

*Others:* "They'll Know We are Christians" © 1966 Peter Scholtes; "You Alone Can Rescue" by Matt Redman; "Alive In Us" © 2011 Reuben Morgan; "I Am Loved" ©1978 William J & Gloria Gaither, Gaither Music Co.

## "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself" Women's Sunday Program

**Purpose:** Awareness of human trafficking – a way of loving our neighbors at home and abroad who are being affected by this horrific issue.

**NOTES:** I have tempered the graphic nature of the information that is included in this program, but since it is about such a difficult issue, feel free to adjust some of the content. I don't think there is anything that would be too graphic for children, but you could just let the parents know ahead of time what you will be presenting or provide a children's church type of activity during this part of the service (if your church doesn't already have one).

I suggest that on Women's Sunday, the women take part in the normal opening of the service (greeting, announcements, prayer, singing, offering, etc.) with the consent of the pastor or elders.

## Scripture

We have been studying the parable of the good Samaritan throughout the year in our WHFMS meetings and would like to share a bit about what we have been learning with you this morning.

Scripture reading: Luke 10:25-37 (NIV): The parable of the good Samaritan

On one occasion an expert in 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.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 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. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out 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.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

### **Sharing**

Please feel free to take a few moments now to share about what you, as a group, have learned together from this passage. Focus on what has stood out to you and been impactful.

### **Message**

Most of us are very familiar with this parable where we see an act of mercy played out in how the Samaritan helped the man on the side of the road. It reminds us of the

EXTRAVAGANT mercy God extended to us in the sacrifice of his son, Jesus, on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Verse 37 in our passage tells us that we, in turn, are to extend mercy to others. In the Beatitudes, Jesus taught, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are reconciled to the Father and have a responsibility to demonstrate God’s mercy and love to others.

As individuals and as members of a church body, we offer this mercy and grace to each other, our families, friends and others that God places in our paths as we walk through life. As a denomination, we work together to do this more corporately, in several ways, to make a larger impact. One such way is through the Department of Women’s Ministries, as we strive to create awareness of the issue of human trafficking. It is a massive issue, involving millions of people all around the world that will take many people and organizations working together to create an impact.

One of the best ways to do this is to be aware of it. The more people know about this issue, the harder it will be for traffickers to hide what they are doing. So, what is human trafficking? The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.” There are an estimated 50 million people trapped in slavery around the world.

In 2021, 10,359 situations of human trafficking were reported to the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline involving 16,554 individual victims. Shocking as these numbers are, they are likely only a fraction of the actual problem.

In their 2022 Trafficking in Persons report, the U.S. Department of State wrote, “Everyone should be free. And yet, through force, fraud, and coercion, human traffickers violate this most basic right. Traffickers’ exploitative practices affect every country in the world, including the United States, by diminishing and destroying our communities, sense of security, and the global economy.”

We have a video to show you this morning. It is titled, “5 Signs of a Human Trafficker.” Knowing the signs will help you to be aware of situations that you, or someone you know, might encounter that should raise a red flag. It will also help you to understand how someone might get involved with a trafficker in the first place and how hard it might be for them to find a way out.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivM8HSZzusc> (11 minutes long)

If you would like more information on this issue, resource guides are available. Please see me after the service.

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV) says, “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Let’s close in prayer.

**OPTION:** Here is a link to another video about the signs of human trafficking that you can use if you’d prefer. It is about two minutes long and you would just need to adjust the intro paragraph a bit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQFQqU3O9GM>

**Shared by:** Beth Larkin is the Coordinator of Women’s Ministries for Advent Christian General Conference. She loves assisting churches with ministry to women and strives to offer support to pastors’ wives throughout the denomination. Beth is a strong advocate for human trafficking awareness and coordinates with churches and ministries to offer awareness events in their area. Beth and her husband, Matt, live in Maine and enjoy attending their daughter Mallory’s soccer games and cheering on the University of Maine’s men’s hockey team as season ticket holders.



# Week of Prayer

*Pat Havener*

**PURPOSE:** In this lesson, we will reflect on what this parable teaches us about neighborliness and pray for God's guidance and leading to love neighbors.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 10:25-37

**PREPARATION Needed:** Have Bibles available for those who need one, and assign. Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother. If using music, acquire enough hymnals for each person to have one. Optional: Have a recording or an instrumentalist play accompaniment.

## WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR? A GOOD SAMARITAN REFLECTION

*Luke 10:25-37, King James Version*

“25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

*A more modern version: Luke 10:25-37, Christian Standard Bible*

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

“25 Then an expert in the law stood up to test him, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the law?” he asked him. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,**” and “**your neighbor as yourself.**”

28 “You’ve answered correctly,” he told him. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 Jesus took up the question and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion. 34 He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him. When I come back I’ll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.’

36 “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

37 “The one who showed mercy to him,” he said.

Then Jesus told him, “Go and do the same.”

Now, let’s read the Scripture again, with a different translation:

*Luke 10:25-37, Hawai‘i Pidgin*

“Da Good Guy From Samaria

25 One teacha dat teach God’s Rules wen stand up fo aks Jesus one question fo trick him. He say, “Teacha, wat I gotta do fo get da real kine life dat stay to da max foeva?”

26 Jesus say, “Tell me, wat God’s Rules say inside da Bible?”

27 He say, “Get love an aloha fo da Boss yoa God wit all yoa heart, an wit everyting inside you, an wit how you tink, an wit all yoa power. An get love an aloha fo everybody jalike you get love fo yoaself.”

28 Jesus say, “Dass right! Do dat an you goin live fo real kine.”

29 But da guy like make himself look good, so he aks, “Wat you mean, love an aloha fo everybody?”

30 Jesus say, “Had one guy. He wen go Jericho town from Jerusalem. Den had some guys dat wen jump him, rip him off, bus him up, an leave him dea fo mahke. 31 Bumbye one Jewish priest guy come dat same road. He spock da guy, an go da odda side. 32 Same ting, one guy from da Levi ohana dat help da prieses, he spock him, an go da odda side too. 33 Den one guy from Samaria going dat road wen come wea da guy stay, spock him, an get pity fo him. 34 He go by him, put olive oil an wine on top his cuts, an wrap um up. He put da guy on top his own donkey, an bring him by da hotel, an take care him. 35 Da nex day he take out two silva coins an give um to da boss fo da hotel, an say, ‘Take care him, an wen I come back I give you wateva you wen pay.’

36 “Now, wat you tink? From da three guys dat wen pass, who wen get mo love an aloha fo da guy dose guys wen bus up?”

37 Da teacha guy say, “Da guy dat wen show pity fo him.”  
Jesus say, “Go, make lidat.””

I was drawn to this translation. How many times do we speak “Christian” or quote/read Scripture in a way that so many do not understand? Are we reaching out to our neighbors in a way that we are understood?

On one of our short-term mission trips, one of the youths frustratingly announced, “Why can’t they just speak English!” I have heard this comment in the US, as many of you have. When sharing Jesus with our neighbor, do we speak a language that they can understand? Are we speaking a “language” that only Christians understand?

Who doesn’t love the story of the Good Samaritan? Jesus tells a parable in Luke 10 that demonstrates Israel’s failure in this area. The parable is about a man who is robbed, beaten and left for dead. In this story, two men come upon this victim: a priest and a Levite. Both men saw the man in distress but went out of their way to avoid him. It is important to note that these men were identified as religious leaders. Then Jesus introduces another person into this story. The third person was identified as a Samaritan. This is very important. The Jewish people viewed Samaritans as half-breeds, both physically and spiritually. Samaritans and Jews practiced open hostility toward each other, yet Jesus intentionally makes the hero of the story a Samaritan. The hated Samaritan took pity on the injured man. He went to him. He bandaged his wounds. Then, he transported him to an inn where he could be cared for. To top it all off, he paid for this man’s care out of his pocket. Jesus is teaching that love and mercy know no national boundaries. But he is also showing that prejudice is wrong. This parable was told in response to a question from a lawyer who was trying to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against him. Jesus jumped right into the trap and turned it into an opportunity to teach a very important lesson.

In the Gospel of John, the religious leaders would accuse Jesus of being a “demon-possessed Samaritan.” This false accusation would be used to try and discredit everything Jesus said and did. This demonstrates the hatred they had for all Samaritans and Jesus. How would you have felt if you were a Samaritan man or woman in the temple courts that day?

We are living in a world that is about to explode. At the heart of this crisis is the inability to see people the way God sees them and the inability to love people the way God loves them. I see this as an opportunity for the church to rise and demonstrate God’s love to those who feel marginalized in our society. You see, right now we have a choice. We can choose to be the priest or the Levite in Jesus’ story. Or we can choose to be the Samaritan who demonstrated love and mercy!

### **I am thinking of Fred Rogers.**

Mr. Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister. Then, he followed Christ into the neighborhood and television and the hearts of children and adults alike. Fred had a vision that his television program could teach children about love, goodness and the dignity of every human being. It was not just words. The people in his neighborhood and the actors he included in the series manifested diversity, including gender, racial and sexuality. Fred Rogers believed that cultural diversity and differences are to be celebrated.

Fred Rogers embodied what it meant to be a neighbor rising above prejudice and hostility. “Won’t you be my neighbor?” he sang; asking and living that question is the good news in action. It is our highest calling. What neighbors, “others,” may fear and hate, ignore and exclude is ours to accept and include, celebrate and bless. I often wish that Mr. Rogers was still alive to help us sing his song. “It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood. It’s a beautiful day for a neighbor. Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Since we’re together we might as well say, please, won’t you be my neighbor?”

Now it is up to us to sing and live that song. How do we sing the song of Mr. Rogers who sang the song of Jesus? By speaking up when in the presence of racist or sexist jokes or bullying. By making efforts to reach out to those of different races, religions, economic classes and cultures. By learning how to proclaim and defend the rights and freedoms of all people. And, most subversive, perhaps reaching out to those of different political parties. These days, that’s a tough one for me.

Mr. Rogers built an entire TV show, for over three decades, on one simple question: Won’t you be my neighbor? It doesn’t matter how much money you have. It doesn’t matter what language you speak. It doesn’t matter what color your skin is. If you’re present, you’re invited. Won’t you be my neighbor?

“Won’t you be my neighbor?” That’s one of my hopes. I hope that our church starts to look a little bit more like Mr. Rogers’ neighborhood. I hope that you would get here a little bit earlier and hang out a little bit longer. Maybe you just spend 15 minutes hanging out and talking with people a little bit. I hope that you’d open your house, or your condo, or your apartment to somebody you don’t know that well. That you’d invite them into your space, your life, a little bit. I hope that if you’re lonely, you start to find friendships. My hope is if you feel unloved, you start to feel somebody’s arms wrapping around you. My hope is if you’re a cynic, you start to say, “If Jesus-people are like this, I might want to explore more.” I hope that we’d look a little bit more like Mr. Rogers’ neighborhood.

You may have noticed that we live in a cultural moment that’s as divided as it’s ever been. You don’t have to look too far to find ways that you differ from the people around you, whether it’s religiously, politically or ethnically. There are several ways we can choose to draw our lines in the sand and define ourselves by what we are or by what we aren’t. I just want to propose an idea to you. I think that’s a tired way of living. I think Jesus has more for us. In a moment where 46% of Americans report feeling lonely, maybe God is calling the church to be part of that healing balm that says we have room for you around our table, in our homes and in our lives. What if God wants to use us to breathe a little bit of hope? Won’t you be my neighbor?

Here’s a word that’s the opposite of hospitality: xenophobia. That means fear of the stranger. Fear of the one who doesn’t look like me, whom I have a few questions about. We have a few disagreements. Fear of them. Did you know that you cannot be afraid of your neighbor and love your neighbor at the same time? What Jesus is calling us to is a fundamental attitude toward the other that says we have room in our hearts and our lives for you ... exactly the way that you are. We don’t offer hospitality to change people, but we create space where they can change.

Imagine going to the gym ready to work out and the trainer says, “Welcome, we’re so glad that you’re here because health and fitness are all that matter at the end of the day. This workout is going to be amazing. This is going to be great! You’re going to get ripped. You’re going to get shredded. It’s going to be unreal! Have a great day! God bless you!” But then he walks right out without training you at all.

You go the next day, and the trainer says, “All right! We’re going to work the legs today. We want to be equally yoked up top and bottom. Right? We’re going to get after it. It’s going to be amazing! You’re going to do great! You’re going to do wonders! You’re going to be a beautiful person when we’re done with this! Goodbye! God bless you! Have a wonderful day!”



Does church ever feel like that? You get pumped up, but then no action occurs. Most followers of Jesus think praying for their enemies is a great idea; very few of them do it. Most followers of Jesus think being a neighbor is a great idea. I think very few of us do it.

It's easy to have figurative love for imaginative neighbors, but that isn't what Jesus is calling us to do. Look at the way the Good Samaritan lives this out. He *saw* the man. He *went* to him. He *bandaged* him and poured wine and oil on his wounds. He *put him* on his donkey. He *brought him* to an inn and took care of him. He returned to check on him. This is real love for a real neighbor. One of the ways you can know if you're offering real love to a real neighbor is whether it costs you anything. The Scriptures say we know what love is because Jesus laid down his life for us. It cost him something and therefore we should lay down our lives for others as well.

If you're looking for something to do this week, can I encourage you? Turn your bulletin over and draw a tic-tac-toe board on the back of it. Write "me" in the middle of it. I'd love for you to spend some time and think through man, who are my neighbors? Real names. And see how many of these boxes of people live around you. If you live in an apartment, you're looking at a cube. Who are your neighbors? Real names. Not ... "I think that guy's name is Bobby; he could be Bobby; he should be Bobby." No! Real names. Ten percent of people can do this, fill out every box. Only 10 percent. If you're part of the 90% like me, no guilt, no shame, but what I'd love for you to do is say, "Jesus, which one of these houses might you want me to get to know a little bit?" You might have to eat some crow. You may have to go up to them and say "hey, we've been neighbors for the last five years. I've asked you your name before, but I don't remember what it is. What's your name?" That's a hard conversation. I know because I had it. But it's important. Real love for a real neighbor demand that we know their names.

Here's a question for you. Why do you think Jesus picked a Samaritan as the star of his story? If Jesus's only point in the story of the Good Samaritan is "you should love your neighbor," he doesn't need the Samaritan to be the star of the story, does he? It could be a Jewish layperson, it could be anybody, but he picks a hated person as the protagonist of his story. Why does he do that? I think he wants to suggest to you and me that the us verses them divide is trite, is tired and should be done away with. Us verses them is no way to live. Drawing a line in the sand and saying, "We're against you because of X," is NOT the way of Jesus. Why does he pick a Samaritan? Because he wants us to realize that **kingdom allegiance** is greater than **tribal adherence** and just going along with the party line. The divisions that keep us apart. Well, I'm progressive. I'm conservative. I'm a Republican. I'm a Democrat. I'm an American; you're not. I'm a Christian; you're not.

So, he decides to make the Samaritan the star of the story. The Samaritan is the one who is becoming neighborly. The Samaritans are the ones who are living in the way of Jesus. You wonder if he sort of stood back and went, “Ha! Ha! Take that!”

Two things for you, first, you do not have to agree with people to love them. Does God love you? I believe that with every fiber of my being - God loves you. Does God agree with you in every way? Probably not! And, we don't all agree with each other, so God can't agree with ALL of us, right? He loves you, but he doesn't necessarily agree with you. You don't need to agree with people to love them. We have got to get this right, you guys! I believe that followers of Jesus are getting run over in our cultural moment because we've lost sight of this.

Here's the second thing: You do not need to agree with people to treat them with dignity, value and kindness, and to recognize the image of God within them. You don't need to. You don't need to agree with them to do that! I don't know about you, but I want to be part of a church that says, “Won't you be my neighbor?” We have all sorts of differences. We have things we don't agree on, but maybe it's not anything that they just HEAR while they're here. Maybe it's like me watching Mr. Rogers; I don't remember ONE episode! You may not remember one sermon, but I hope you remember the way that you feel when you're here. I hope the way that you feel is man, there's something about these people ... they care for me, they love me, they're for me, they're going to be with me in the hills and the valleys.

So, Jesus looks at this man and asks “which do you think was the neighbor?” The man says it was the one who had mercy, the one who had compassion, the one whose insides turned when they saw this man and he did something about it. He acted on it. That's the neighborly guy. He can't even say the name ‘Samaritan.’ Jesus responds with this simple, mic drop moment ... wonderful, go and do likewise. You should do that! You should become that kind of person ... where your religion doesn't keep you from loving. Where **mercy** is greater than **religiosity**. If it was in fact, I'll be ceremonially unclean if I touch that dead body. If it was the fact man, if this guy's Jewish, I need to help him, if he's not then who cares. What Jesus says is no, no, no, no, mercy triumphs over religion. It's not just about what we can do to appease God, it's about actually living in the way of Jesus. That's what he is inviting us to do.

**If your religion prevents you from loving, it's not from Jesus.** Read through the Gospels. Look at every time Jesus heals on the Sabbath. Could he have healed on Sunday, the next day? Sure! He could have. Why does he do that? Because he wants to break down the systems that oppress people instead of lifting people. That robs people's life rather than the



things that bring people life. Throughout Jesus's ministry, he's chipping away at religiosity and saying mercy is BETTER than religion.

So, the question isn't "Who's my neighbor?" The question is: Am I becoming neighborly? That's where Jesus wants to lead us. What if you started with the conviction that Jesus has me exactly where he wants me for a reason. What if you didn't just by happenstance choose the house that you're in, the apartment that you're in, the condo that you're in? What if Jesus has a reason for your being in that very place and his reason is that you may be a conduit of his grace, of his mercy and his love to strangers that he might invite you or call you to open your life to? So, in a world full of divisions and fissures and fractures, I just want to end by saying one thing ... love your neighbor. Love your rich neighbor; love your poor neighbor. Love your gay neighbor; love your straight neighbor. Love your dirty neighbor; love your clean neighbor. Love your loud neighbor; love your quiet neighbor. Love the neighbor you like; love the neighbor you don't like. Love your neighbor PERIOD. And just like he did, throughout the first, second and third centuries, I think Jesus might just use his church to transform the world.

I want to end by giving you just a few practices and then I'm going to lead us in an imaginative prayer exercise to end. I think we need some handles for this message so it's not just an idea. Here are a few things you could do this week: I would encourage you to fill out that Block Map (tic-tac-toe). No guilt. No shame. Just fill it out honestly and start praying over it. Maybe this week you start prayer walking around your neighborhood. As you do so, just introduce yourself to people. Say hi! to them, get to know them a little bit. Make that a part of your practice. It's good for your health, it's good for your witness. It's good for everything. I'd encourage you to download the nextdoor app. You'll get connected with a bunch of people in your community if you're not already. You'll find out things that are going on. I found out things that were going on in my neighborhood that I celebrate, that are awesome, that are great. Maybe you open your house and have people over for dinner, for lunch, whatever. What might Jesus do to say to you, "Come on? Come a little bit deeper. What does it look like to become a neighbor?"

I just want to invite you to spend a moment asking Jesus what he wants us to do with that. How does he want us to live this out?

Let me invite you into the story. There are already people in your life for whom you can make space. This may be hard. There may be some unspoken things between you and these people. Maybe some of these images may resonate. Scroll through photos. Maybe sporting alliances. Maybe that house that seems to have everything ... or the people that live down the road ... in a tent. Maybe the barrier is political; your perspectives are

different and it's hard to understand them. Maybe it's those people you feel justified to feel against. God has created so many people.... all that he's placed his image upon. There is someone in your life that Jesus may be inviting you to be a neighbor to today. Or this week. Or this month. So, take a moment and ask Jesus, quietly within your heart, to reveal a face, someone to whom you can be merciful.

Jesus turns once more to you and says, "Remember the story of the Samaritan. Go and do likewise." Amen.

Jesus, we want to become people who genuinely, in real ways, love the people that you've divinely placed around us. Give us your heart, we pray, give us your mind. Lord, as we step out in practice this week, would we see you move in both our hearts and the lives of the people around us, we pray. In Jesus' name. And all God's people said ... Amen.

### **Consider these questions:**

How do you usually react to injustice? What character would you be if Jesus put you in his story? Have you ever said or thought something that wasn't true about someone? Why is Solomon's warning about prejudice (partiality) relevant to our time?

### **Points for prayer**

- Don't allow yourself to be influenced by religious ideologies. Allow the Holy Spirit to empower you to see everyone in the same way he does.
- Let God slow you down so that you don't miss seeing those who are in need.
- Become a source of encouragement for those in need by showing and demonstrating God's love and mercy.
- Throughout the church, pray that prejudice, partiality and racism will be overcome.

### **Suggested Prayer:**

God, I'm sorry for how bad things have gotten and how deep my personal fall has gone. My thoughts, words and actions have offended you and hurt others. There are a lot of grieving people right now and with good reason. Many people do not see anything wrong with what is happening. Thank you for your mercy, grace and kindness. I pray that your church comes alongside those who are grieving and mourns with them. I pray that you will give each of us the opportunity to share life everlasting with those who don't know you yet. Please allow us to bind up the brokenhearted and free the captives. Please make me and your church like Paul, who was all things to all people. In the name of Jesus Christ, I ask. Amen.

**Shared by:** Pat Havener lives in Seffner, Florida with her very patient husband of 49 years. Gary pastors the Seffner Community Advent Christian Church. Pat enjoys gardening, herbs and their cats Priscilla and Pete, especially Pete, who at 30 pounds needs a diet. She is a proud grandmother to seven grandchildren. Pat directs the church children's programs and serves as her local and national WHFMS Spiritual Life Chairman. Pat is taking time away from volunteering for the Children's Heart Program of Samaritan's Purse but continues to train medical folks in women's and children's health in Honduras. She is a Certified RN Clinician, specializing in STDs, Women's health and pediatrics.