May 4/5, 2024

What Does Love Look Like?

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom

Luke 10:25-37

Pastor Jeff Petersen

Okay. It's quiz time this morning. Are you ready? Now don't worry, you only need to respond to yourself and in your own mind, okay? Now my quiz has two parts, and there's a couple of questions in the first part. Here's the first question: What does Jesus want for us and from us more than anything else? Second question: What does Jesus want to produce in us and bring forth from us, more than anything else? Got your answer in mind? Okay, part two, this is fill in the blank. A person who really frustrates me is "blank". Or a person who really annoys me is “blank”, or a person who really makes me mad, is "blank". Now, maybe it's not a single person; maybe it's some of those people who do "blank," or say "blank," or believe "blank".

If you can't come up with someone, a person, or certain types of people, I am either rejoicing for you because you are living a life of great freedom, joy, peace, and love, or I'm grieving for you, because you may not be able to be honest with yourself about the state of your heart. Because almost all of us have people that we struggle with, and typically, it's because of at least one of four reasons. Number one, they have personally hurt us.

You know, I was very surprised a few years ago, when a context brought to mind a person I grew up with, who I had not even thought of or seen for decades. And when this person's name came to mind, immediately here's what came into my heart, "I hate that guy!" And it was because of some things that he did to me in junior high 45 years ago! Yet still there was this hate in my heart, and I had work to do, to deal with my heart and my mind. We struggle with people who hurt us.

Second, perhaps we struggle with people who hurt someone that we deeply love. Third, we struggle with people who represent some sort of a threat to us, and fourth, I believe that we struggle with people whose beliefs, positions, words, character, or actions discourage, frustrate, annoy, or maybe even disgust us. Now, how does the call of God in the first part of my quiz fit together with the reality of life in the second part of the quiz? After all, in real life, what does love look like? That is what we want to wrestle with, together as Jesus challenges the people of His day, and you and me today as well.

If you have your Bible with you, would you open to Luke, Chapter 10? We're going to begin today in verse 25. As a reminder, we are in our Kingdom Stories series. We are telling the parables of Jesus as we seek to learn how to live as the people of God in the one true kingdom. Today we have another great insight from Jesus, and we begin with a conversation that is taking place with Him in Luke 10, and verse 25:

> **And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** (*NASB 1995, Luke 10:25)

Now, when we hear the word **lawyer**, we have all kinds of cultural connotations that come to mind. That's not what this guy was at all. He was an expert in the Jewish law. That means he would know front to back the first five books of what we call the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. He was a religious expert, and he is doing what? He is testing Jesus…putting Him to the test. And he says, **"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** Jesus responds, and as we notice Jesus' response, we need to remember and understand that everything we're going to hear and talk about today comes in a context. He is responding to this expert in the law regarding his question and this test, and how does Jesus respond?

> **And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"** (Vs. 26)

He turns it back. He says, "You're the expert. You're the expert in the law. You tell me, what does it say? How do you read it?" And in verses 27 and 28, we read:

> **And he answered, "YOU SHALL 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 YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."** (Vs. 27-28)

The expert in the law, expertly goes right to the heart of the point that all of the law is about, the great commandment. In another place, Jesus will actually say, "All of the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands, to love God with all that we are, and to love others as ourselves." Note too in Jesus' response, when He says, "**Do this and you will live,**" He is not endorsing some sort of a works-based salvation. Rather, this is a picture of the hearts and the lives of those who are living, trusting in Him. And then in verse 29, we come to a critical key in the text, because this verse is going to be key to understanding everything we're talking about today. And we find two things in this verse: a "What?" and a "Why?" Verse 29:

> **But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**

First, the "What?": "**Who is my neighbor**?" This is the specific question being asked of Jesus that Jesus will go on to answer. But the "Why?" behind the "What?" is told clearly to us by Luke. Why did he ask this question? Because he was **wishing to justify himself**. And so, in response to that "What?" and even more so in response to that "Why?" Jesus is going to tell a parable.

Now, just a word again about parables. Parables were stories told to a specific audience with a common cultural understanding. And the story will often come with a twist—an "aha moment"—where the meaning clicks for that original audience. A few weeks ago, Matt shared that it's like when we tell a joke. What makes the joke work is the contextual and the linguistic shared understanding we have of the twist of the irony. For example, I have a joke for you this morning.

Matt told one a few weeks ago. I didn't think was very good, so I thought I'd give it a shot. *(laughter)* There are some wonderful dentists in our church. So, I'm just wondering, "What is the best time to go to the dentist?" "Exactly! 2:30." (*Tooth hurty) (laughter)* Ah, the "aha moments," or maybe for us, the "groaning moments". But often when we read parables in the Bible today, we don't get or understand the "aha moments". Our parable today is particularly prone to this problem, and thus it is prone to being a bit misunderstood. And making matters worse, the vast majority of people in this room have heard this parable so many times we think we get it. We think we've got it. But I would ask us today, to seek to listen with fresh ears and open hearts, as we explore together the parable of the Good Samaritan. Verse 30:

> **Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii (two days' wages) and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And (the expert in the law) said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."** (Vs. 30-37)

Now again, we have great familiarity with the story. A guy is hurt. Two guys don't help. One guy does help. He was merciful. We're supposed to be merciful: help the hurt and the broken, and care enough to stop and render aid. Even go out of your way to help those in need. "Love the least of these." "Check. Got it. Next?" But as Lee Corso is so fond of saying on College Game Day, "Not so fast, my friends." Let's unpack this thing just a little bit. I want to unpack it this morning, focusing on the characters in the story.

The first character we find is right here in verse 30, the man who was going from Jerusalem to Jericho. This could have been any Jewish man. Perhaps he'd been at the temple worshiping, and now he's traveling back home. He's going down this road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which was a dangerous road. And what happens on that road? He meets the most unfortunate of circumstances, falling among robbers who strip him and beat him and leave him half dead…just left him to die. Now in the plot of a crime story, he would be known as what? The victim, right?

So then in verse 31 comes a second character. The second character is the priest. And, by chance, the priest was going down the road, and what are we told about the priest? Well, we're told that he saw him. He clearly saw him and passed by on the other side. Then in verse 32, comes the third character, likewise, a Levite. Also, when he came to the place, what happened? He saw him. He saw him but passed by on the other side.

Then in verse 33, we're introduced to our fourth character, a Samaritan who was on a journey. He came upon him, and when he saw him, **he felt compassion**. This word translated ***compassion*** is the same word used to describe Jesus throughout the New Testament. In fact, it is the word used in Matthew 9, when it is said of Jesus, *"When He saw the multitudes, when He saw the crowds, He was deeply moved with **compassion**, because they were harassed and helpless, distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd."* That's the word used to describe this fourth character. When he came upon him, he too saw him, but he felt compassion, and he took action.

Now, we need to remember and realize this is not a historical account. This is a fictional story that Jesus makes up to make a point. So, Jesus chooses the characters, the action, the outcome… everything…which then begs the question, "Why? Why does Jesus assign the characters as He does? What is the point that Jesus is making to this expert in the law and to all who are hearing Him on that day? And what is the twist, the 'aha moment'"? When we hear the phrase "Good Samaritan" today, it is synonymous with helping others. I mean, we have Christian Good Samaritan Health Insurance plans. We have Good Samaritan Hospitals. We have Good Samaritan Societies. We even have Good Samaritan laws that require helping others when they're in trouble and protecting people from liability when they do so. In our day to day, "Good Samaritans" are really, really good. But what was it like for these first hearers? How would this story have unfolded for them?

Let's think about it. The first character plays which role in the story? The *victim*, right? And he was simply any one of them. This could have happened to any Jewish man. And if we were to seek to contextualize this story to our setting today, we could actually think of it as being a member of Lincoln Berean Church. Perhaps someone who was here, gathered with us in worship, was traveling home and is attacked, robbed, beaten, stripped, and left for dead. It's horrific! And the scene is set.

Now, enter the second character, the priest. "Cue the Indiana Jones music:" "Duh duh duh duuuuh, dun dun dun." The hero has arrived on the scene, the highest leader in the religious strata, the most God oriented of us, presumably the most godly person, arrives on the scene. And if we were to try to contextualize that to our setting today, we might just say, "Ryan Harmon, our lead pastor, just showed up." The hero is on the stage. But wait, what's this? What's happening? The hero just did what? He sees this person in their dire straits, and he does what? He turns his head away. He crosses to the other side of the road, and he slinks on past with head down and tail between his legs. The original audience would have heard it just like we do. "Wha wha whaaa." Because think about it. What if you heard that Ryan Harmon actually did something like that? How would you respond?

But wait, there's a second chance. The third character enters the scene and it's a Levite. Phew! "Duh duh duh duuuuh, dun dun dun." More Indiana Jones music, for a Levite was also a devoted religious worker, serving and keeping up the practices of worship at the temple. And so when we think about this in our context today, we're appreciating today our friend, the great worship leader and songwriter, Jared Anderson. So, let's imagine Jared Anderson comes next upon the scene, and

surely this man of God will prove to be the hero in our story, right? Cue the buzzer: "Ehhh". It isn't happening. Sure, we are clearly told once again, he sees the man…but perhaps not wanting to soil his classy bow tie, he slinks across the road to the other side, and just passes by.

The original audience would have been befuddled, confused, and very curious. Now, the astute audience members who've heard Jesus before, would have guessed where this was going. Next down the road would come a normal, everyday Jew, because Jesus often spoke against the religious establishment. So, this must be another such story, right? Wrong! Absolutely wrong, and no one in that audience could have even imagined what Jesus would choose to say next. This is the twist in the story.

Who is the hero? None other than a Samaritan, one of the people most hated, disdained, rejected, and reviled by the Jews. That is who the Samaritans were to the people in Jesus' original audience. So, I will let you choose, in your own mind, who the modern equivalent would be today. But I guarantee it would be someone you do not think very highly of, probably someone in one of those groups in the quiz at the beginning that you find yourself disdaining, maybe even disgusted with. For if Jesus were telling the story today, that is who He would be making the hero in the story. Why? If the Samaritan—that fourth character playing the role of the hero in this story—what does that make the priest and the Levite—Ryan and Jared—in ours? The villains!

Now, let me just be clear. I'm not saying Ryan or Jared would act like the priest or the Levite. But that's the kind of "smack you in the face" impact Jesus' choice of characters and roles would have had on this original audience. Why? What is Jesus doing? What is He saying? What is He teaching? Again, we have to go back to the purpose of the parable. Why did Jesus tell this particular story? Again, verse 29:

> **But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**

It was in response to the question, "**Who is my neighbor**?" and to a motive, **wishing to justify himself.** And how does Jesus answer? First, He doesn't! He doesn't define who counts as my neighbor, as the expert in the law wanted him to do, in essence giving him a license to only love some people or some kinds of people…in his context, his own people. Instead, Jesus flips the entire thing on its head, and shows what it means to be a good neighbor. And He illustrates it, using the most unlikely possible person to them to be the hero. And He turns the expected heroes into the villains. Wow! Why? What is He saying?

Well, let's go back to what this is all about. It's about the great commandment. And what is the great commandment? Verse 27:

> **"YOU SHALL 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 YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."**

What does God want most for us? And from us? It is to become and be the kind of people who really do love Him with all that we are, and our neighbors as ourselves. Now, if I were to ask you, "How are you doing at that?" I think when it comes to the second part, most of us would likely answer like the expert in the law. We think we're doing fairly well. I'm guessing we would say, "Yeah, I seek to be nice to others, and love people. I do lots of kind things to care for others. I even give regularly to ministries that help the poor and needy. I'm doing okay, I think… probably a solid B grade in this." I'd certainly be prone to think that way. And that is exactly what the expert in the law was thinking. This is why in verse 29, he sought to justify himself to prove he was doing pretty well, hitting singles and doubles, if not homeruns, in this whole *love your neighbor thing.*

For you see, the truth is, we are all almost always the hero in our own story, at least in our own mind. Or we are the heroic victim who has been wronged by someone else. It is really not often when we think we are the villain. Think about it. When was the last time that you sat with someone describing something that had happened, some difficult circumstance in which you found yourself? What part did you play in the story? I'm guessing it was either the hero or the victim. And who was the villain? Someone else, of course. That is how we are so prone to think. And I believe Jesus shares the parable of the good Samaritan in the way that He does, because we need to be cut to the quick, and realize we are not always the hero in the story.

In fact, there are so many times when our hearts are filled with something far less than love for another. So many times, we are frustrated, angry, disdainful, contemptuous, withdrawn from, or even openly hostile to, disdaining another who has wronged us, hurt us, or hurt someone else we love. Or how about those people who reject us, disagree with us, seek to embarrass us or shame us? In some way they threaten us and the things that really matter to us in our lives, in our world. We are so quick to have hearts that are filled with anything but love for them. And I believe Jesus is calling each of us to humble ourselves and stop thinking we are always the victim or the hero and that someone else is the villain. Like the teacher of the law that Jesus was answering, we need to stop seeking to justify ourselves, if we actually want to become and be the kind of people who are able to truly love God with all that we are, and even others as ourselves, even disdained others.

Now, perhaps it would be easy for us to think Jesus is just asking a little bit too much. But let's remember our context. Where is Jesus going when He tells this parable? He is on His way to Jerusalem. What will await Him there are people who will reject Him, mock Him, spit in His face, beat Him, revile Him, and eventually crucify Him. And how will Jesus respond? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He will love them, even as they are hating Him. Incredible!

By the way, the Samaritans, the ones Jesus makes the hero in the story, how well did they do at loving Him? You know, it's interesting. On Palm Sunday we talked about Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem and how He sent disciples ahead to get this colt. And if they have a problem with it, just say. "The Master needs it," and then arrange this upper room, where everyone will go, and everybody responds just as they should. It all goes right. That wasn't always the case. Flip back with me just a page or so to Luke, chapter 9. I want to show you something that happened just before Jesus told this parable. Luke 9, beginning in verse 51:

> **When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] And they went on to another village.** (Vs. 51-56)

That happened shortly before Jesus tells this parable in which He makes a Samaritan the hero, the very ones who had just rejected Him. And James and John's response clearly indicates Jesus' disciples had a long way to go in understanding loving your neighbor as yourself, including even loving your enemy. And I can't help but think that Jesus chose His characters, not just to answer and teach the expert in the law, but to teach His own disciples as well. For can you even imagine their internal response as this story would unfold?

Friends, Jesus is calling us to a completely different kind and quality of life. That is what life in the kingdom of God is all about. And Jesus tells the expert in the law, **"Go and do likewise."** But what would, "Go and do likewise," look like for us? Well, what did it look like in the parable? What did the Samaritan do? What does love look like? From the Samaritan, we can see seven things that love does. Now, it's not meant to be a prescription or an exhaustive list, but it sure does give some practical ideas. What did the Samaritan do? He **…came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion.** 1) Love *cares*. And he **came to him**. 2) Love *comes*. And **bandaged up his wounds**. 3) Love *heals*. **…pouring oil and wine on them.** 4) Love *comforts*. And **he put him on his own beast.** 5) Love *carries*. And he **brought him to an inn and took care of him.** 6) Love *protects*. **And On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'** 7) Because love *sacrifices*.

So why does God call us to this? To things like loving even our enemy? Is it because that's the right thing to do and the Christian life is just filled with bitter pills, and we need to just suck it up and swallow them, because one day God will reward us in heaven? No, I believe it is because this is the most free and joyful way to live...in the Kingdom of God, right now!

This is who God made us to be and the fullness of joy is found as we learn to be these kinds of people. Look at Jesus. No one has ever more fully modeled loving their enemy. Was it because he just sucked it up and swallowed bitter pills? Hardly. It is because HE IS the most loving person who has ever lived. He literally loved and had compassion for the people who were mocking Him and killing Him. There is no more extraordinary life. There is no greater joy than to be so free and so full of love. And God desires to make us the kind of people whose hearts and minds are so free and full of love that we actually can love everyone. And anyone. Including even <u>THAT</u> one.

But it starts with doing some honest heart work. Who do I not love? Or who am I sometimes failing to love well? It might even be a family member or someone else close to you. Or maybe it's a

specific type of person. Perhaps people who are in a different political camp or living with a different worldview. Well, what if each of us were to find some way to move toward someone like that in genuine loving engagement, willing their good, and seeking to bless them? What difference could it make?

Think about the opposite. Just turn on the news. Look at any social media feed. There is so much anger, so much hate, and we despise those that we think are hating us or causing harm. That's our response. We think they're wrong, and they're doing the wrong thing. And our response is often anger and even hatred toward them. Where does it end? No wonder our world is such a mess. But what if there's another way? The Jesus way.

That's what the parable is really all about. It is a convicting call for those who would hear and heed God's great commandment. And there is a crucial order in that great commandment. We must go to God first. We must give Him first place in our hearts and lives, to cultivate a deep love relationship with Him above all things, for to love others requires first receiving His love. Because God is the ultimate good Samaritan, He binds our wounds. He brings healing to our hearts and lives. He comforts; He cares; He protects; He provides, and He sacrificed everything to bring His infinite love and goodness to us.

So, what if you and I were to figure out those who have an ugly hold on our hearts? What if we were to let God love us and heal us, so that we might be set free? And what if you and I, maybe even this week, actually did something to bring healing comfort and care to them? In the power of God, to sacrifice, to love, and serve them. Just watch and see what God will do in changing you, bringing joy, hope, peace, light, and love to you, and through you. Because that is what love looks like. It's what Jesus was teaching. It's how He lived and lives toward us, the people who were once enemies of God, but who have now received mercy. So, in the power of His Spirit, depending on Him for His strength, and to infuse His goodness and love into and through us, let us, by faith, ***go and do likewise, in His name.***

> *Jesus, thank You that You model something so radically different for us. It's such a different picture of what life looks like when being set free to become and be the kind of people who are filled with love, and living a life of love, first and foremost toward You. And then, with all that we are, literally being set free to love everyone and anyone. Oh, God, thank You for teaching us. Change us, we pray, for Your glory and for the good of a broken and dying world. In Your name, Amen.*

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SPRING 2024 // WEEK 5

Life Group Questions

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom // May 4-5, 2024

What Does Love Look Like? // Luke 10:25-37

Introduction

This week's sermon took us through the parable of the Good Samaritan, a recognizable narrative that challenges followers of Jesus to reflect on compassion, prejudice, and the true essence of loving our neighbors – as well as our enemies.

We invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Some people even use these questions to take notes during the sermon. The questions are meant to stir your thinking and prompt open discussion and we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) What's the funniest, weirdest, or most memorable encounter you've had with a stranger?

2) Have you tried any of the Personal Spiritual Exercises this session? How did God use it in your life in a specific way? Or what have you heard God saying to you in your personal time in quietness, prayer and scripture reading?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:

a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth

b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives

c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

Read the full passage together with your group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) **To whom is Jesus telling the parable of the good Samaritan? Why is this audience significant?**

When the lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus directs him to two commandments that he would know from the Law: love God and love your neighbor. **What is the connection between these two commandments?**

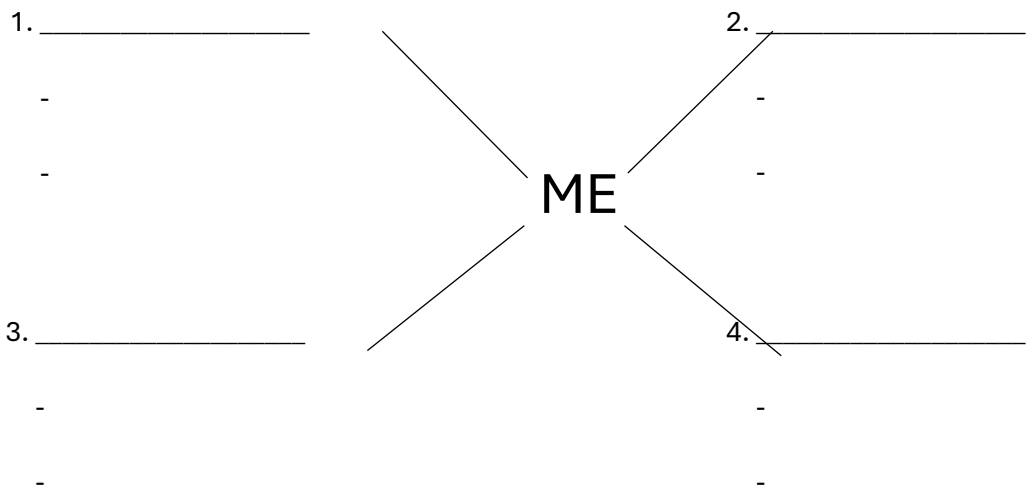
When the lawyer follows up by asking "Who is my neighbor?" scripture makes it clear that it's not out of genuine curiosity, but from a desire to justify himself (verse 29). **In what contexts or relationships do you find that you tend to struggle with justifying a lack of love for someone?**

2) Jesus makes the lesson of His parable very clear: to be neighborly is to have compassion for those around you. **What did Pastor Jeff tell us about how a first-century Jewish audience would respond to the Samaritan in this story?**

The context of this parable alludes to the audience using their cultural identity as an excuse for their prejudice and even hatred. **What excuses do you use to avoid acting in love like Jesus toward those around you?**

How does this parable help us to think about who our own neighbors are?

3) Let's take some time to consider how we love our neighbor in the way that Jesus demonstrates. On the lines below, write down up to 4 areas of influence you have in your life. These could be friend groups, teams at work, social clubs, classmates, etc. Then, in the spaces beneath them, write down the names of 1-3 people in each group that you may find some conflict with (personal, political, moral, ideological, etc.).



When you've completed the lists above, take a few minutes to pray for <u>one</u> of your areas of influence and the people in it. You can either do this with your entire group or split up into groups of 3 or 4 to pray together. The goal is to practice praying for those who you may not always understand or get along with, to surrender control of those relationships to the Lord, and to ask Him to provide you with new methods and opportunities to show love to those people as Jesus taught.

4) **What does the parable of the Good Samaritan teach us about what it means to live in God's Kingdom?**

We are assured elsewhere in the Bible that we will always face all kinds of trials and adversity in this life. Because of this, we can assume that conflict will come our way even if we behave like a good neighbor every day of our lives. **How do we prepare our hearts and minds for that conflict?**

In the next week, how might you take a step to intentionally love someone that you struggle to love, bringing God's love in the power of His Spirit?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Prayer Focus: Revisit our group discussion exercise in question #3 in which we prayed for the people close to us that we don't always agree with. Plan out time this week to pray for all of your areas of influence and the people in them. Pray for God to work in their lives and allow them to glorify Him and ask Him to open your eyes to how you can show them love and compassion in your everyday life.

Scripture Focus: In this week's chapter, when asked what one must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus alludes to the commandments "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 your neighbor as yourself," (Luke 10:27). Elsewhere, in Mark 10:17-22, Jesus is asked the same question and responds in a slightly different way. Take time to read both of those passages this week and consider what Jesus is saying about the reality and nature of the eternal life that He provides, and how it relates to the Kingdom of God.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?