

## Won't you be a neighbor – Luke 10

Mr. Rogers is one of the longest running programs in TV history. It ran nearly **900** episodes, from 1968 to 2001. And we often don't remember him as such, but Fred Rogers was a minister. He was given a special ordination by a local branch of his denomination to serve children and families through television, to be an evangelist to children. Before filming each day, he would pray: *"Dear God, let some word that is heard be yours."*

His most iconic words of all time might be: *"Won't you be my neighbor"*

The dictionary defines neighbor as: *"A person near or next door to the person speaking."* How we, God's people, define neighbor is crucial.

**Deuteronomy 6:5** is a portion of the law that Jews recited daily that states:  
*you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.*

### **Leviticus 19:18**

*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself*

Again, we see that neighbor in Leviticus is synonymous with a fellow Israelite, your people, members of your community. Neighbor is determined by picket fences and proximity. This was their script. The lens they operated from.

## **READ LUKE 10:25-37 // PRAY**

The expert in the law comes to Jesus with a good question:

*"what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?"*

Jesus- as he often did- responds to a question with a question.

He asks him – "what does the law say?" appealing to his expertise.

The expert in the law responds with the texts we opened looking at, Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

But it says – *"looking to justify himself"* – he asks, *"Who is my neighbor?"*

He likely expects Jesus to reply with notes from Lev 19, implying a select community.

But Jesus uses a parable of this man who had been beaten within an inch of his life by robbers...

And the **Good Samaritan** that saves his life.

**The Samaritans** as a people date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC when the Assyrians conquered the Northern kingdom with its capital Samaria and exiled its people, leaving only the most poor Israelites behind. These poor intermarried with the pagan Assyrian colonists as well as the nations around them ...and in doing so were deemed unfaithful to the nation of Israel.

They were viewed half-breeds.

There was no love loss. They believed horrible dehumanizing caricatures of one another.

"All Samaritans are \_\_\_\_\_."

"All Jews are \_\_\_\_\_." *Sound familiar?*

"All conservatives are \_\_\_\_\_."

"All progressives are \_\_\_\_\_."

"All immigrants are \_\_\_\_\_."

"All pro-lifers are \_\_\_\_\_."

**And Jesus' ultimate ANSWER in this text is so crucial.**

Jesus flips the question.

Jesus ends by asking a new question, **“which was a neighbor?”**

The expert in the law tried to judge and assess who is his neighbor...

The better question Jesus gives him - *Am I a neighbor who shows mercy to those in need?*

Jesus takes the question about the word *neighbor* and flips it as a **mirror**.

He takes a judgmental question and makes it reflective...

***Rather than assessing who is your neighbor***

***Jesus asks - are you neighborly?***

Loving my neighbor, being a good neighbor, learning to walk in the greatest commandment...

**it's ultimately about MY IDENTITY, not theirs.**

It's about MY HEART, not what they look like, vote like, worship like, talk like, or behave like.

When we adopted Raj, our now 8 year old son from India,

I had a lot of conversations about it along the way. And along the way I got questions like:

*“Why don't you adopt from your own?”* (implying America)

**Jesus teaches that a neighbor isn't defined by proximity, but by humanity.**

If it's defined by humanity – then guess what – ethnicity doesn't matter.

If it's defined by humanity – nationality doesn't matter.

If it's defined by humanity – religion doesn't matter.

The application for the recipient of this parable?

**“Go and DO...”** Be a neighbor. The world asks “won't you be my neighbor?” Be one.

There are two things that keep us from neighboring well and being a neighbor that I want to look at tonight... the first is:

***Ethics in abstract.***

Social media has created the ability to reflect on tragic situations in the abstract. Read up on it.

Maybe post about it... followed by a hashtag. Followed by logging off and forgetting all about it.

There are plenty of Christians going to church that are like this religious leader in this story.

We've got the latest Christian best seller on our coffee table. We talk theology and debate doctrine. We clean up our own act.

*But there's no GO and DO.*

We talk about issues in abstract, but never get dirty.

It's why **religious people can make the worst neighbors.**

We've got head knowledge that stops at the neck. We never get to being God's hands and feet.

The fact God commands us to love shows that love isn't abstract, it's something we do

Love isn't passive and abstract. It's GO and DO.

But we don't get to that, because often the trouble may not be ethics in abstract, but that we are:  
***Numbed by suffering***

When your neighbor is elevated from proximity to humanity...  
Our global neighborhood is a hot mess. It can seem overwhelming.

**“Commencement Speech Morality.”** You have the spark and energy and potential to change and save the world. Make a name for yourself by solving these problems and doing the most good you can do. The bigger the better.

**“media saturation overload” / “headline stress disorder”** that we get from “doomscrolling.”  
**73%** of American just last year reported stress and feeling overwhelmed with the issues facing the world they live in.

**Awareness** is a good thing, but when we take in crisis after crisis, and suffering after suffering, we can become numb to it. Desensitized.

*Imagine for a moment that all your technology vanished. No cable television. No social media. Who and what would be left in the world around you?  
Psychology would tell you - that is what your mind is created to carry.*

While our definition of neighbor can be too small... linked to **proximity** instead of **humanity**.  
But when it comes to BEING a neighbor, sometimes we think so big we become paralyzed...  
When it comes to BEING a neighbor... **proximity** and **ability** become key.

As Jesus redefines neighbor we see we need to **elevate** our **definition** and yet **dial back** our sense of **responsibility**. Only God is omnipresent. Only God is omnipotent.

The first two passer by's in the story of the Good Samaritan weren't condemned simply because they didn't aid another human – but because they were up close, in the flesh, eye to eye with a need and able to help – and they still did nothing.

**Their responsibility was due to their proximity and their ability.**

We daily live with the proximity and ability to help the flesh and blood around us.  
If we adopt the glasses with a lens of proximity and a lens of ability  
we'll have less anxiety, and live more neighborly.

**Mister Rogers:**

*“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.”*

The Samaritan came along and as it says in the Amplified translation  
*“he was deeply moved with compassion for him”*

### **Compassion**

The Greek word for compassion comes from the same root as the word for spleen.  
It's to have such strong love for somebody that their situation hurts in your gut.  
Compassion is the opposite of numbness.

Which is why our constant exposure to suffering and the numbness that follows is dangerous.  
Because to be numb to those in need is to be numb to Christ.

In Matthew 25 Jesus himself said – *“whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”*

Want to be close to Christ? Bring the needs of humanity into your proximity.

Adopting Raj – one of up to 20 million orphans.  
Henri Nouwen leaving teaching and preaching to serve Adam, a severely disabled man.

Being neighborly isn't about helping everyone with every need, or solving the world's problems.  
It's about becoming a piece of the bigger puzzle.

There's a void somewhere that you were created to fill, and dare I say you have a  
RESPONSIBILITY to fill created by your ability and proximity to the need.

### **Mr Rogers once said:**

*“A high school student wrote to ask, 'What was the greatest event in American history?' I can't say. However, I suspect that like so many 'great' events, it was something very simple and very quiet with little or no fanfare... The really important 'great' things are never center stage of life's dramas; they're always 'in the wings.' That's why it's so essential for us to be mindful of the humble and the deep rather than the flashy and the superficial.”*

This applies American history and Church history  
The early church knew the plot and understood the assignment.

**The Emperor Julian** was a Roman emperor not long after Christ walked the soil of the Roman Empire. Christianity at the time was growing while paganism was on the decline.

We have his lamenting and venting about the situation on record, where he says:

*The religion of the Greeks does not prosper. Why do we not observe how the charity of Christians to strangers has done the most to advance their cause? It is disgraceful that these Christians support OUR poor in addition to THEIR own, while everyone is able to see our own people lack aid from us.*

The politics in Rome had the Greeks taking care of Greeks. Romans taking care of Romans.  
What Emperor Julian called “our people.”

This is par for the course for politics.

We as Christians and the Church have different responsibilities than a government or state does.

Christians were supporting— listen to his words: ***“Our poor in addition to their own.”***

Politics and culture was operating from a script of US and THEM or US vs. THEM – sound familiar? Meanwhile - Christians were showing the love of Christ for strangers, US FOR THEM. Because really, ultimately there’s only US – the global neighborhood of humanity, desperately in need of a savior.

What was causing the explosive growth of the early Church? Being a neighbor to strangers. What was grabbing the attention of emperors and kings? Being neighborly.

Mister Rogers would have been a fan. To come full circle and close, he once said:

***“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”***

**Proverbs 3:27** in the Message version reads:

***Never walk away from someone who deserves help. Your hand is God’s hand for that person***

In Matthew 25 we do unto Jesus as we do unto our neighbor in need.

And according to Proverbs, they meet the hand of God.

There’s something beautiful about that combination.

May we ***GO and DO likewise***, seeing need and responding, showing mercy to the one in need.