

ELEMENTS

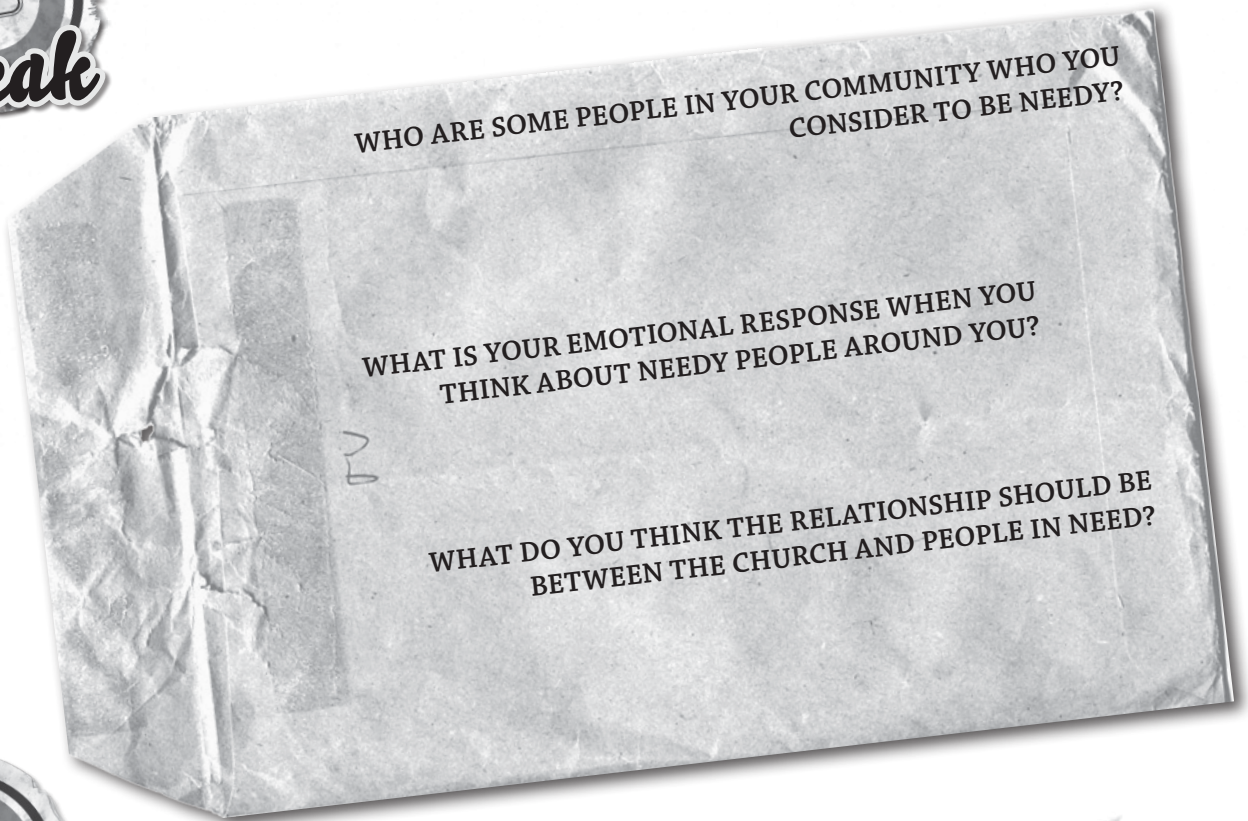
Loving Service

SERVING THE NEEDY WITH MERCY AND COMPASSION...

8
LESSON



Talk about what you think...



Study

Engage with the Bible...

LUKE 10:25-37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷ He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." ²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" ³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

This parable or story is one of the most famous that Jesus told. It is the story of a "Samaritan" man who helped a stranger. During that time the Samaritan people were looked down upon by the Jews because of their mixed Jewish and Gentile ancestry. In contrast, Jesus taught that we need to have a heart of mercy and compassion for those around us and act accordingly.

Discovering the key themes

1

Who is my neighbor?

Jesus answers a key question from an expert in the law about loving our neighbors as ourselves. The expert in the law asks, "Who is my neighbor?" How does Jesus respond to this question? Who does he say our neighbor is in the story?

To love your neighbor as yourself seems like a strange saying at first. But most people work hard to take care of themselves by eating the right food, getting enough sleep, and washing. We love ourselves in very practical ways. Jesus is teaching us to move beyond our needs and take care of others - even strangers - with the same kind of care we would give ourselves.

2

Religious people vs. loving people

In this story we see two "religious" people walking right past the man who was beaten up. What did the Samaritan have to sacrifice in order to help this man?

The phrase "actions speak louder than words" means a lot when we talk about loving others. Jesus wants us to know that to love others means we need to take action to meet specific needs. There are people around us who are poor and don't have the basic means for living, people who have special needs like the elderly, handicapped, or unemployed or children who have no parents or home. God wants our hands to be his hands, our strength to be his strength, our love to be his love that is given to those in need.

3

Being a real neighbor

What is Jesus' point here? What does it mean to be a real neighbor to someone else?

It means recognizing a need and doing something about it. The Samaritan did not just pray for the man or speak kind words to him. He took action to help him and it cost him his own time and money to do it.

4

Mercy and compassion

It's obvious that the Samaritan was the real neighbor here (v37). He is the only one who had mercy. What does it mean to have mercy on someone?

Mercy and compassion are what motivate us to help those in need. They are emotional responses toward a person in difficulty that should lead us to action. The original word for mercy, which was used in the time of Jesus, assumed not only showing compassion but also performing some act of kindness or concern, even if a person didn't deserve it.

In summary, it is helpful to ask 'Who are the poor?' Mother Teresa said, "in the poor, we find Jesus in disguise." Bill Hybels says, "Throughout Scripture, God's concern for the poor is a recurring theme. The Biblical definition of "the poor" goes beyond those who simply have little money, to those who, due to various circumstances in life, lack the basic necessities for existence. A review of the Old Testament prophets, the Gospels and Acts, reveals that the term "poor" encompasses those who are hungry, disabled, imprisoned, shut out by society. Jesus often encountered men, women and children for whom his "good news" included ministry to their physical as well as spiritual needs."

Why should we help the poor and the needy?

BECAUSE JESUS DID

Jesus identified himself most closely with the poor and needy: He walked and taught among them as one of them. When he sent his disciples out he told them to take nothing with them so that they would learn to depend on God to meet their needs.

Mark 6:8-13.

BECAUSE GOD TELLS US TO

God says there will be consequences for those people who ignore those who are in need. The book of Proverbs states it clearly, "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered"

Prov. 21:13.

BECAUSE OF MERCY

Mercy and compassion for the needy is part of Christ's character and therefore should be a quality of the church: While near a town of the Samaritans, a despised ethnic minority group, Jesus looked out upon the crowds with compassion because they suffered two things – harassment and helplessness

Matt. 9:36.

BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT JESUS

Matthew 25:31-40 makes it clear that Jesus somehow mysteriously embodies those in need: the prisoner, the sick, the hungry, the needy, the thirsty, the stranger. And when we have compassion on them and meet their need we are somehow touching Jesus Christ directly.



Applying it, experiencing it, practicing it

1

Evaluate your own ability to be merciful and compassionate. Are you allowing this part of Christ's character to change your character? Make a list of all the times in the last month you have heard or seen and responded to a need of a person outside of your personal circles (family, friends etc.).

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Start with your literal neighbor and make some effort to express your love and care toward them. (Shovel their snow, help them with some project, bake or cook them something special, invite them for a meal).

2

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3

Make a commitment to God that the next time you see a person in need or hear a "cry", you will do your best to respond to it.

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Ask at your church or investigate on your own any opportunities to work with groups who are already working with needy groups (orphanages, retirement homes, widows, homeless, single mothers etc.).

4

Skills Summary - Loving Service Ideas

- Pick up trash or plant grass, trees or flowers in a local park.
- Visit an orphanage and hang out with the kids.
- Offer to help with some special physical improvement project in your neighborhood (painting, cleaning, building etc.).
- Visit a retirement home and hang out with grandmas and grandpas!
- Prayer walks - Walk around your city praying specifically for it and what you see. Either do this together as a group or walk individually and then talk about it together afterwards.
- Instead of ignoring a beggar, next time buy them a meal or a cup of coffee.
- Bake a cake together as a small group and take it to a widow, an elderly person or someone in need; and then spend some time with them.
- Spend a day with the street kids (games, eat something, etc.) and ask God to give you a vision for helping them on a regular basis.
- Volunteer at your church services:
 - Coat check-in (in winter one Sunday a month)
 - Nursery (take care of children during service so mothers can attend)
 - Door greeting
- Take a meal over to a family where the mother has just had a baby.
- Clean an elderly, handicapped or poor persons house.
- As a youth group, sponser and pray for a child in a third world country.
- Fund raising projects (e.g.: Christmas gifts for the poor or for homeless children, etc.).
- Organize visits to the hospital where you can spend time with those who are sick and need company.
- Youth group birthday cards (put a group in charge of sending hand-made birthday cards to everyone in the mail).



Real Stories from Central and Eastern Europe



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How does this work out in you this week?

SUMMARY VERSE AND MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK:

MATTHEW 25:40

The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

EXPERIENCING IT DURING THE WEEK:

Theme	Passage	Questions
1st Day – God's blessing	<i>Proverbs 19:17</i> <i>Proverbs 22:9</i>	To be gracious means to give someone something they don't deserve. Do your feelings that the poor are not worthy ever stop you from giving to them?
2nd Day – Humility in giving	<i>Matthew 6:2-4</i>	Are there things you can do to insure that you help the needy for the right reasons?
3rd Day – Embody Jesus	<i>Matthew 25:31 - 40</i>	If you really believed that the needy represented Jesus, how would it change your attitude toward them?
4th Day – Favoring the needy	<i>Luke 14:1-14</i>	Do you think you have a habit of favoring the beautiful, healthy, rich, well-dressed, educated, or popular people over those who are less fortunate?
5th Day - Faith and action	<i>James 2:14-17</i>	Can you identify anyone in your life who might need food or clothes? Can you think of any ways that you might help to meet that need?
6th Day – Pure religion	<i>James 1:27</i>	Make a list of any orphans and widows you know. Ask God to show you how to help them in the days ahead.
7th Day – Rich vs. Poor in faith	<i>James 2:1-7</i>	Is there something about money that keeps a person from having strong faith? Is there something about being poor that helps a person have strong faith?



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