

If the Good Samaritan was a real person then he may be one of the most famous people ever. Still today helping someone on the side of the road is known as being a Good Samaritan. The news just this week included any number of them. One such Good Samaritan called 911 after seeing a baby locked in a hot car in Connecticut. In Seattle a Good Samaritan was shot and killed while trying to break up a robbery. A Good Samaritan was credited with helping two police officers in New York rescue a teenager caught in the intake of a dam. A San Diego police officer was aided by a Good Samaritan as he was being assaulted by a suspect. All Good Samaritans in the vein of the Good Samaritan Jesus mentioned in the gospel.

Stop and think about that story. No question the man who fell into the hands of robbers was in need. He was beaten, robbed, and left half dead. Two different individuals walked past opposite him without stopping before the Samaritan. When he saw help was needed he immediately got right down and gave aid. **"He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine."** After giving him aid on scene he put him on his own donkey and traveled with him to the local town. With no hospital he paid for a room at the local inn. Even paid for supplies to care for him there. Then paid the innkeeper for the next couple of days. And finally he went further and said he would pay for any other expenses.

Obviously Jesus was emphasizing the compassion of the Samaritan. He definitely went above and beyond. In today's terms it might be like you coming across someone stranded on the side of the road. You stop. It's 100 degrees so you offer some water. Then you go further and drive them in your car to the nearest hotel. There you pay for the room in advance for a week. Then you tell the hotel manager you'll pay for any food they order or supplies they need. Then if they have doctor bills you pay those. That would start to equal the compassion displayed by the Good Samaritan.

A couple months ago Jennifer and I were driving along Reno Avenue right near Myriad Gardens. It had rained but the traffic was light. I believe we were on our way to a show or maybe we were finished eating at a restaurant. Either way stopped at a light there was a man walking on the sidewalk. As he crossed next to us he tripped over the legs of a street barricade. I saw it happen. Immediately I pulled ahead, put on my flashers, and jumped out of the car. Still laying there, kind of dazed, we went over and asked if he was okay. He nodded and said nothing was hurt. We helped him to his feet and asked where he was going. He said the Cox Convention Center. I think he mentioned something about sheltering there. He thanked us. We got in our car and he kept on walking. That's being a Good Samaritan right? I can feel good about helping someone right? I demonstrated Christian faith right?

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in response to a lawyer who had approached him with questions. **"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"** The lawyer was fixated on the law. He knew it, studied it, and lived it. He knew the answer too when Jesus turned the question back onto him. **"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."** Jesus agreed. Achieve that kind of love for God and love for neighbor and eternal life would be earned. But stumble just once, fail just once to love God perfectly with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind or fail just once to love your neighbor as yourself and it would be over. No eternal life earned. Hell earned, judgment earned.

So the lawyer asked a follow up question. **"And who is my neighbor?"** He wanted limits. There had to be a definition of neighbor that could limit God's laws enough where he'd be able to keep them. Then he could have some basis for saying he earned heaven and eternal life. If by some definition neighbor just includes homeless guys downtown that fall and I help up, then I'm good. Sure I jumped out immediately to help. I got the man up. I would have called for ambulance if he had been hurt bad. I would have stayed with him if he needed that. That was Christian faith being exercised. But driving away both Jennifer and I were thinking the same thing. Did we limit ourselves? Did we go far enough? Jesus would say, no. We could have driven him to the Cox Center just a couple blocks away. We could have given him money to get a hotel room out of the rain. We could have taken him to a shelter. The Good Samaritan story says that still wouldn't have been enough. Not enough to earn God's favor. Not enough to earn heaven.

We find it easy to limit ourselves. We limit who we help. There are a bunch of homeless people all needing help. We limit how we help. Only going so far and no further. We limit our compassion, then when we meet that level we feel like we achieved something. We ask who our neighbor is when we should be asking who can I be a neighbor to? The biggest surprise for the lawyer wasn't the Samaritan loading the man on his donkey or paying for the inn for multiple nights. It was that a Samaritan helped. The religious people didn't stop but the enemy did. The one least expected to help, helped. It was a lesson for the lawyer and for us. Limiting God's law of love for God or neighbor doesn't earn us anything. Limits show us we're guilty before him. We haven't done enough to be saved. We haven't lived a perfect enough life to inherit eternal life. Inheriting eternal life requires the kind of perfection we could never achieve. We could not help enough homeless, never give enough money to beggars on street corners, we could not help enough family or church members. We could never go far enough to inherit eternal life.

So we should leave here feeling bad, is that what God wants? For us to feel guilty and maybe resolve to help the next person we see. Maybe we feel like calling up the food bank or making a huge donation to some charity. Maybe we feel like giving away our clothes. Maybe we feel guilty for the car we drive or the homes we have or the problems we aren't facing. Jesus told this story of the Good Samaritan and it seems to work. People will do all sorts of good things to help others when they hear it. But the question you and I need to ask, are we doing these good things for the right reason with the right motivation? Does God really want us walking out of here with more guilt than we came in with because of this story?

I think Jesus smiled when the lawyer asked his first question, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** I think he smiled because at that moment Jesus and the lawyer were thinking the same thing: both thinking about eternal life. But never was there a bigger contrast in how to achieve it. The lawyer wanted to do. Jesus knew what God would do, specifically what he would do. The key was in the very verses that the lawyer quoted. He quoted law passages, parts of God’s word that tell people what to do and not to do. But how they can do that is imbedded there. **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart...”** That quote is from Deuteronomy chapter six. If you looked there you’d see Lord is written different, all capital letters. That special form calls attention to a special name for God. He is the LORD, the God of free and faithful love, the Savior God. He calls for love, but he alone supplies that love. The heart, soul, strength, and mind that he wants all of, he gives to you new based on his love for you. The Savior God calls for your heart and he provides you with his love.

And there’s more. A priest and a Levite pass by the man beaten by robbers. They figure he’s not worth their time. A Samaritan stops. He sees value in this dying man. He sees value where others did not. And he took action, the extra mile, over and above. He gave of his own personal treasure to see that care was given. He sacrificed time and effort to make sure help was offered. He got personal with someone unlike him and who could offer nothing. Sound familiar? This isn’t like any Good Samaritan story you’ve read in the paper or even lived yourself. Jesus found value in you even when you were dead in your sins. He found value where others did not. He took action for you. He gave of his own personal treasure and sacrificed himself completely for you to see that you got the help you needed. He came up close and personal with you. He called you through his gospel. He came to you in the water of baptism. He offered himself to you in his own body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. He gave to you what no one else could or would. He saved you because he is the God of free and faithful love. Jesus is THE Good Samaritan.

See it’s not about how far we’re willing to go to help someone. It’s how far Jesus was willing to go. That saves us. He showed love and compassion like the world has never known. He took us, half dead from the side of the road, and picked us up and bandaged our wounds. He shed his own blood so that we would not have to shed our blood. He paid the price for our stay and gave to us what we had not earned. Eternal life is inherited not by what we do but by what Jesus has done.

With eternal life secured and hope and comfort to look forward to, you have motivation to see the Good Samaritan in another light. As example to strive for. Don’t worry about looking for people to be neighbors to, God will bring them into your life. See the opportunities all around you to care, help, and go to great lengths for them. Being free in Christ you can be open and God will place people right in your life that you are called to serve. God had me in the right place to help that man off the street when no one else was around. God’s grace to me jumped me out of that car. Forgiveness moved me to ask if he was okay. Next time God’s grace and forgiveness can move me to take another step and look for further ways to help.

Every news article you read that includes a Good Samaritan, someone who stopped and helped and got involved, is a great reminder of the Good Samaritan that Jesus told about. But let it also call to mind that no matter how much help we offer or the lengths we go, none of it saves us for heaven. For that you need THE Good Samaritan, Christ Jesus himself. The lengths he went to for you are enough to inherit eternal life. Those lengths are also a great example for you, being forgiven, to see what you can do to show God’s love and compassion to someone else.