

Living in God's Kingdom

Lesson 4: Love

*Notes for the leader: This is the fourth in a series of lessons about "Living in the Kingdom." This lesson focuses on the story of the Good Samaritan and on Jesus's teachings about what it really means to show love -- even to an **enemy**.*

Introduction

Jesus told people that the Kingdom of God is all about **love**. But he wasn't talking about the "warm, fuzzy," emotional kind of love. He was talking about **real** love -- **God's** kind of love.

This lesson is about a "love story." But it's not the kind of story most people think of as a love story. It's about a man who showed mercy (and therefore love) to an **enemy**.

In the previous lesson, we offered a definition of "forgiveness" as being a **decision** to relate to someone who has done wrong to you **as if it had never happened**. We pointed out that that's what God does for us — He forgives us, **He relates to us as if we had never sinned**, and then **He expects us to do the same to each other!**

Let's try to come up with a similar definition for "**love**."

Notes for the leader: Ask for suggestions about what "love" means. Try to find a positive point to reinforce in each suggestion. Try to draw out that love means trying to to "do good" for someone, and that it doesn't necessarily depend on whether that person shows love for you..

The kind of love that Jesus is talking about is not an **emotion**, it's an **action**. Love is an **attitude you decide to take in your relationship with someone** – trying to do good for them, even if they aren't trying to do good for you. If you accept this definition, you can begin to see how it's possible to show **love** to an **enemy**. You may not **like** him, but with God's help, you can show **love** to him!

Let's look at a story Jesus told about a man who showed love to an enemy. This story may be a little different from other parables that Jesus told. Some Bible experts think this story may have been based on an actual incident, which the people Jesus was talking to would have known about.

To understand the significance of this story, you need to know that the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other, for reasons that went back hundreds of years. Some of the problems were racial differences, and some were religious differences. The situation was not too different from the way the Israelis and Palestinians feel about each other today!

Samaritans and Jews would have nothing to do with each other if they could help it. If they had to travel through each others' territory, they did so as fast as possible, and they planned their trip so they wouldn't have to sleep or even eat on the way!

Also, if you aren't familiar with this term, a Levite was a kind of assistant to a Jewish priest.

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 fell into the hands of 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, took him to an inn and took care of him.

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.'

"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."

Let's break into small groups and spend a few minutes talking about this story. We'll see if we can figure out what Jesus was trying to tell this lawyer about love.

Notes for the leader: Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.

Follow-up Discussion

Notes for the leader: The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. Who was Jesus telling this story to? What was the situation?

In this case, an expert in the Jewish religious law had asked Jesus about what God expects from us. Jesus turned the question back at him -- after all, he was supposed to be an expert in the religious law. The man answered that God wants us to love Him and love each other. "Right!," Jesus responded. "So what's your problem?" The man's problem, it turned out, was that he wanted a definition of a "neighbor" so that he could choose what people he was supposed to show love for. (Lawyers are still the same way today -- the answer always depends on your definitions.)

What kind of an answer do you think the lawyer would have liked to hear? I'm sure he would have felt OK if Jesus told him to show love for people in his family, or in his own village, or for people who belonged to the same religious group that he did. But instead, Jesus told him this story.

2. In the story, how did the priest and the Levite respond to the beaten man?

They avoided him. They crossed the road and walked by on the other side.

3. How did the Samaritan respond to the beaten man? What did he do?.

He felt pity for the man, and stopped and helped him. He bandaged him up, and took him to an inn. He paid the innkeeper to take care of him, and promised to pay any additional bills if that wasn't enough.

4. What personal risks did the Samaritan take? What could have happened?

The robbers might still have been hiding nearby, and might have attacked him. In fact, the beaten man might have been a decoy.

If some Jews came down the road and saw him kneeling over the wounded man, they might have assumed that he was one of the robbers, and attacked him.

If some Samaritans came along, they might have given him trouble because he was helping a Jew ... one of "them."

The innkeeper might have overcharged him.

5. Who is our neighbor, according to Jesus's story?

If we need help, it's whoever is willing to help us.

If we are in a position to give help, it's whoever needs it.

6. Why does God care if we are good neighbors to each other?

Because he loves us, and wants us to love each other and help each other.

He is willing to fill us with his love, so that we are able to show love to other people -- even to people we may not like!

The Apostle John tells us in his first letter:

1 John 4:7-12, 19-21

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

We love because he first loved us.

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

So please don't be one of those "Christians" who claims to love God, but always seems to find ways to hurt brothers and sisters in Christ. Remember what John said, and show the same kind of love to others that God has shown to you. If you have committed yourself to follow Jesus, this should always be your goal -- to walk as Jesus did. To deal with people as Jesus did. To be willing to forgive people as Jesus did.

Notes for the leader: *Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!*

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Love *(Luke 10:25-37)*

1. Why was Jesus telling this story? What had happened?
2. In the story, how did the priest and the Levite respond to the beaten man?
3. How did the Samaritan respond to the beaten man? What did he do?.
4. What personal risks did the Samaritan take? What could have happened?
5. Who is our neighbor, according to Jesus's story?
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Take-home Thoughts About ...

Love

(Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 4:7-12, 19-21)

The love God wants us to show to each other is an **attitude**, not an **emotion**.

You don't have to **like** someone in order to show **love** to him or her. In fact, Jesus tells us that we should try to show **love** for our **enemies!** He doesn't expect us to like them (or else they wouldn't be our enemies!), but he wants us to love them! (See Matthew 5:43-47.)

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is about a man who was willing to show love to someone who needed help, even though that man would probably not have done the same for him. The Good Samaritan was even willing to take a risk to do so. He was willing to risk that his friends would call him a fool. He was willing to risk that his enemies would misunderstand him. He was willing to risk his time and his money.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:10-11)

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:20)

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