

# The Gospel and Friendship

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Thanks, Hannah. Okay, apparently in an average lifetime, I read this week, we meet around 80,000 people each.
- That's just, I Googled that, so I wouldn't like bet your house on it or anything like that, but definitely the answer is a lot. We meet a lot of people in our lives. Some of those obviously are close friends, perhaps lifelong companions.
- Others would be just a fleeting kind of interaction somewhere, just a single word spoken perhaps, but we meet a lot of people and perhaps all of those people we have, even in the tiniest possible way, an impact on their lives.
- And again, as we said, how do we do that shaped by the gospel is the question that we want to be thinking about and taking away with us this morning. I think we're going to, we'll just get stuck straight into that passage that we've read.
- And the first thing that's worth highlighting in this passage is that it kind of validates the question that we're asking. It highlights that how we deal with other people is a really important thing for us to think about as God's people.
- [ 1 : 1 0 ]     Often with well-known parables in the Bible like this one, the Good Samaritan, we tend to call it, often it's very easy that we might remember the story, but we actually forget about the setting.
- Or we perhaps haven't heard about the setting. We forget why Jesus told the story in the first place. And actually that's really important. We read here in verse 25 that a lawyer, that's a kind of an expert in the religious law, stands up to test Jesus by asking what is needed for eternal life.
- Jesus basically says, well, what does the Bible say? Verse 27, 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 Jesus said to him, you have answered correctly. And so straight away, we see if we're thinking about how we interact with others, the kind of headline answer is that we are to love others.
- We are to love others. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Those who love God love others. This passage begins by kind of stating for us.
- [ 2 : 2 5 ]     That's what Jesus himself says. And so as we come and we ask that kind of question, how does the gospel affect how we deal with other people? We can see that we're asking a really important question, right at the heart of Jesus' teaching on what it means to live as his people.
- And so we're going to do that in a few stages. We're going to look at who these others are, who is my neighbor. Then we're going to look at what that love looks like. And then also how we have the resources to love like that as well.
- And also finally, how we open ourselves up to receive that love too. So there we go. The first thing that we're going to look at is who. We're called to love our neighbor. Who is that?

Who does that include? And you might have noticed that is actually the primary reason that Jesus tells this parable. Verse 29, but he, the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

And that is the reason why Jesus tells the parable. And really the point of the parable is to say anyone, anyone is our neighbor.

[ 3 : 38 ] Let me kind of recap the story. We perhaps know it well, but this man is going from Jerusalem to Jericho. He is from and he's in the area known as Judea.

We're told very briefly how he is robbed, stripped, beaten, left half dead. We don't get much kind of detail of the event itself, but we're told much more about what happens after.

That's where the focus is. And it might be a familiar story, but as we heard, firstly, a priest, one of the supposed holy people, one of God's representatives, one of God's men arrives, and we're supposed to think, well, what a relief, and yet he walks straight past.

Next, a Levite. The Levites were those who were kind of employed in the temple. They were at the heart of religious practice and routine. He arrives.

He also walks straight past. And finally, we read that a Samaritan comes along. And perhaps our familiarity with this story, or perhaps it's the fact that we call this parable the Good Samaritan.

[ 4 : 48 ] Perhaps it's the fact that the Samaritans is now a charity that you can call and who offer you help. Perhaps that all dulls us to the fact that actually the man lying on this road and the Samaritans were enemies.

That the Jewish people and the Samaritans were in opposition to each other. It wasn't just that they didn't have much time for each other.

They didn't get on that well. Jews would tend to not even set foot in the area of Samaria. They wouldn't speak to a Samaritan. For various historical reasons, they literally considered them a lower class of humanity.

There's this incredible division here. This Samaritan has every reason to walk on past. This man on the gutter has every reason to fear what he might do to him.

And yet it is this Samaritan who stops to help. It's this huge twist in the tale, this huge surprise for the first hearers of this parable.

[ 5 : 52 ] And that's Jesus' conclusion to the parable in verse 36, isn't it? Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, the one who showed him mercy.

And Jesus said, you go and do likewise. So again, who is our neighbor? The lawyer asks this question to Jesus. It says, hoping to justify himself, hoping really to narrow things down, I suppose, so he can say, okay, here's the small collection of people I've got to show love for.

Here is my tribe who I need to be looking out for. But Jesus explodes his tiny little categories and he says, it is anyone who needs your help.

It is anyone who God brings into your path who is in need. It is people who are radically different from you. People who the world says have no place being together, but who Jesus calls us to love as ourselves.

That's incredibly, incredibly challenging, isn't it? And I think it's good, let's not be afraid, I suppose, to think of some specific examples of that.

[ 7 : 08 ] Here's an example for us. As a church, we're a church who hold on to the Bible's teaching on marriage and sex, that marriage is between a man and a woman, that that's the biblical pattern for families, that God made us male and female, that's part of his good creation, and that embracing that and living according to God's plan is the path to human flourishing, that that's a good thing.

That immediately puts us in a number of people's eyes, in a pretty kind of small box with some pretty stern words written on it, you know, bigot or phobic or whatever else it might be.

And our world's kind of default setting is hostile opposition between people who disagree. And so then the challenge for us as we look at this passage is to say, well, what does it look like for us to cross over the road, as it were, to show love to our LGBT neighbors?

That doesn't mean that we affirm everyone's behavior, but still a kind of a stark, a very real, a very current example of this would be that those are among the people we're called to love.

Another example, perhaps you've reached that age where you struggle to understand the youth of today. I'm kind of rapidly getting there, I think. You know, they behave in ways you would have never dreamed of when you were that age.

[ 8 : 37 ] Maybe to you it looks like a lack of discipline, a lack of respect. Maybe in a lot of cases it genuinely is those things. Actually, what does it look like to show love to those young people?

Not just the nice ones, not just the ones that we approve of or we approve of their parents, but again, to people radically different from you, growing up in a radically different world to you.

And also, not just talking about this in terms of groups of people, perhaps it's just, you know, that individual at work, that person who lives on your street, maybe even that person here at church who you just find a bit irritating.

Or maybe there's kind of tension and perhaps for an understandable reason, something that has happened in the past. And yet still, Jesus is saying that they are a neighbor who we're called to love as much as we love ourselves.

That the who of loving our neighbor is anyone, perhaps surprising people, perhaps people who are very different to us. And yet, as we think about how the gospel affects how we deal with others, the gospel pushes us out.

[ 9 : 49 ] It bursts our little bubbles of people just like us or people we've got lots in common with. As Jesus teaches us, that our neighbor is anyone who we might come across and that we're to show them genuine love.

So there's the who. In some ways, as we said, that is the kind of the headline question that this parable is answering. Who is my neighbor? Jesus says, it could be anyone and they could be radically different from you.

But I think as Jesus tells this parable, he deliberately gives us an insight into the what as well. What does it look like? What does it look like to love our neighbors, whoever they might be, as ourselves?

Love in the Bible isn't just a kind of a vague thing or a feeling. Love, it is always clothed in action. And I've got three C's that we find here in this passage on the Good Samaritan that show us what that love looks like.

The first one is compassion. That is the very first thing that we are told about this Samaritan. Verse 33, but a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was and when he saw him, he had compassion.

[ 11 : 04 ] A compassion is a word we see throughout the Bible. It's a word that God uses about himself. He says he is gracious and compassionate. And actually, as that word, as it's used throughout the Bible, compassion is something that is always directed toward people who are in need.

To have compassion for someone is to move towards someone who has very little compassion or who is suffering or who has nothing to offer in return.

And actually, this concept of compassion completely turns upside down how relationships work if we don't have God in the picture. Where do we tend to invest?

Where does the world tend to invest its kind of relational energy and time? Well, we think, what have these people got to offer me? What do I get out of this relationship?

Are they just someone who is fun and I can have a laugh with and I'll enjoy spending that time with them? Or perhaps more cynically in an employment situation, is this a useful person to have on the right side of?

[ 12 : 11 ] Is this a good person to make sure they have my back? Perhaps even with those who are struggling, you know, are people going to see how kind I am if I help out here?

Is there something public I can do? Will I get some credit out of that? Will I look good? But to relate to people with compassion means moving toward them for their sake and not our own.

It means investing in needy people, not just those who can give us a lift. For a start, it means having our eyes open. It's not just saying, well, you know, my family are doing okay even though they are a part of our neighbours.

It's not just asking, you know, are my kind of crew or my friends getting okay even though it is important to look out for those close to us as well. But it's also asking, well, who else is around?

Who else has God put into my life, into my path who is struggling? Who it might be easy, who it might perhaps be tempting even to kind of turn a blind eye to and keep on walking.

[ 13 : 16 ] but to love them as our neighbour means moving toward them in compassion. So that's the first C I think that we see, compassion. That leads us to our second C which is costly.

Verse 34, he went to him and bound up his wounds pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him and the next day took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper.

It costs this Samaritan time. It costs him energy. It costs him financially. It costs him potentially even his safety as well hanging around here.

Again, how often have we found ourselves not doing something with someone or cancelling plans because actually it doesn't really suit us. We can't really be bothered. We'd just rather not.

It's easier not to. And how much more could that be said of this Samaritan? Easier just to keep on going because that is what everyone else did. And yet Jesus is saying that often in relationships whether they are with our closest friends or whether they are with people completely different to us but who God has brought into our path there is a cost associated with that and we shouldn't be afraid of that.

[ 14 : 34 ] We shouldn't be surprised by that. Just because something is hard just because something at the time we might not feel like doing that doesn't mean it's not the right thing to do and that is often I think especially true when it comes to loving others.

So this love for our neighbours is compassionate it's costly the last thing we see here is consistent and we see that in verse 35 again and the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper saying take care of him and whatever more you spend I will repay you when I come back.

You know this isn't a kind of a one-off thing this isn't a flash in the pan which the guy kind of suddenly was overtaken by generosity and then just forgets all about no this Samaritan will come back he'll check in he'll incur any further costs he'll demonstrate this this neighbourly love it is a consistent it is an ongoing love and again how relevant that is often the easiest part of kind of drawing alongside someone or helping someone is the beginning isn't it you know it can be very nice it can be very tempting to think that we'll kind of swoop in and we'll be the hero and we'll solve everyone's problems and then we'll kind of ride off into the sunset often the challenge I think comes the kind of counter-cultural nature of the sort of love that Jesus speaks about comes when we're challenged are we going to stick with this are we going to keep on going with people are we going to be consistent and in some ways that's all there in those opening verses isn't it because we've already said we're to love others as ourselves we're to love others as we would want to be loved do I want someone who will just drop in when it suits them or do I want to know that people are reliably there for me in the long term well of course it's the second isn't it and that is the consistent love for our neighbour that Jesus calls us to compassionate costly and consistent okay before we move on really to the most important thing that we're going to speak about here which is the how how can we actually do this

I think it's worth taking a quicker side here on a topic perhaps it's come to mind for a number of you here which is the idea of boundaries as we're looking to help other people is there a worry perhaps that as great as all this sounds this sounds like an incredible way to treat other people but actually could this not just be a path to disaster for ourselves if we just keep on kind of give give giving you know where are the boundaries here and having thought about this biblically speaking I think that we want to say yes there is wisdom in setting boundaries because it's recognising that actually we can't be everything for everyone it's recognising that actually we are not anyone's saviour each one of us are finite we are limited we need to accept those limitations so there are boundaries that we have to set it's also necessary I think for the people we show love to it's not actually caring to have people come to depend on you entirely because that is a weight none of us can bear so there's wisdom in boundaries and being clear about those with yourself and others but also what

I'd really like to say here is that as we look at the world around us if we look at the world around us as our template well then those boundaries will be drawn in a lot more closely our focus will be a lot more on ourselves than if we look to the bible if we look at the world around us we'll be encouraged to draw those lines much sooner than perhaps the bible would the boundaries the world suggests will not say in humility count others more significant than yourselves as the apostle Paul does the boundaries the world will suggest will not say lay down your life for others as the apostle John does the boundaries the world would suggest will not say give everything take up your cross and follow me as the lord Jesus said following his pattern of sacrificial service and love and so yes there is wisdom there is need for boundaries as we look to show this love to our neighbour but let's make sure that those boundaries themselves are shaped by the gospel and not by the world so that they allow us to demonstrate this radical compassionate costly and consistent love that

[ 19 : 27 ] Jesus calls us to that's just a kind of a side note side thought on boundaries do come and find me if you'd like to talk any more about that but let's move on here and think about what I think is probably the most important thing that we need to hear the most important thing for us to take away with us this morning at the heart of what we're talking about which is how do we do this what Jesus lays out in this passage about loving our neighbours is something incredibly challenging isn't it we've been saying it's something incredibly counter cultural I hope also if we've been kind of making our way through here we see it's something incredibly attractive as well you know just imagine if we as a church were known both within our congregation with one another but also in our community among the people that we live and work and spend time with imagine if we were known as people who really did demonstrate this love if as Jesus says we really did go and do likewise it would have a huge impact on those around us within the church and outside of the church as well it would be a great advert for Jesus and the gospel encouraging people to find out more so again and the big question how do we find the resources how do we find the strengths to live this out and the answer is this that we can only love our neighbour this way if we are first keeping ourselves focused on

Jesus and his love for us we can only love others this way if we are first keeping our focus on Jesus and receiving his love for us it is true as kind of worldly wisdom would say that we can't give out more than we're receiving in that that's a recipe for disaster and the fact is if our only source of kind of receiving of being built up is from other people then we will have to kind of balance our relationships like we're saying what can I get what can I give how much can I do and how much do I have to keep and hold back for myself but when we turn to Jesus we receive his perfect love for us it is Jesus who has demonstrated the ultimate compassion for us and that we were lost and needy we were helpless and so he himself came to save us and to bring us home it is Jesus who paid the ultimate cost that actually in his love for us he suffered and died so that we might be forgiven it is Jesus who in his love it is perfectly consistent

Jesus who will never let us down who is faithful to keep his promises so we can rest and find our security in him it is only as we keep looking to Jesus that we can love others in a way that doesn't have us at the center it's only as we keep on coming back to the gospel that we're able to love in this way that reflects the gospel in Jesus I have all that I need through Jesus I know what God himself thinks of me that I'm so loved by him that he would come and die for me that enables me to show love to others not just so that they'll love me back in order to kind of shore up my identity my worth but to love out of generosity to love with a degree of risk to love sacrificially desiring above all else that those that we love imperfectly still would come to know the perfect love of Jesus Christ for them and the gospel transforms how we deal with others with our neighbors whoever they might be and they could be anyone remember the gospel should make Christians the most loving people we can imagine not because we're such great folk but because in

Jesus we have first received such great love I think if you find yourself struggling to love others well if the picture painted in this passage perhaps just seems too difficult too alien I'd encourage you this morning don't give up but do dwell more and more on the great love that Christ has for you the great love he has shown us in the gospel keep coming back to that that's the only way that we'll be able to live this hour and let me say this as well as a real encouragement if you are doing this you know kind of striving after this this pattern that we've been talking about this morning and I know that lots of people in church are if you are engaged in this and it can at times feel frustrating or tiring it can feel like you're giving out more than you're getting back whether within the church or whether in relationships outside the church as well remember it's okay to feel like that because there's a good chance that that humanly speaking you are giving out more than you're getting back from others but let me encourage you to keep on going to keep on doing that to keep on loving well but to keep on coming back to Jesus and finding in him what you need what we all need to move forward keep on loving God first with all your heart soul strength and mind loving because of his great love for us in Jesus and through that loving your neighbor as yourself and we've seen this passage that loving our neighbors being involved in the lives of those around us it's not it's not really an option it's a it's a command from

God it's right there in the kind of two headlines love God love others we see that it could be anyone it's compassionate it's costly it's consistent and it is only possible through looking first and foremost to Jesus finding our strength our hope and our joy in that incredible love that he has first poured out on us and let me just finish them by saying one more thing and this is really moving slightly beyond the passage that we're in this morning but I think it's important to bear in mind and to take away with us as well we've spoken mostly focus mostly about how to give this love to others about how we first need to receive that love from Jesus for ourselves we need to accept that love and what Christ has done for us but I would hate us to go away I would hate it to seem as if I'm saying that because of that we don't need love from other people too that we don't need other people at all the gospel means that we don't find our fulfillment or our satisfaction in others as our hope is in Christ but it doesn't mean that we say well I've got Jesus so I don't need anyone else now you know I'm all sort of completely by myself being completely dependent on others and being completely independent of others are both equally kind of non biblical positions they're both attitudes which means that we think we know better than God because in his perfect wisdom and kindness God has brought us as his people together that the church as a family the church as a body the church as a community is God's idea is God's plan and just as we are to show God's love and to show God's care to others through our love for them so God wants to show his love that love we desperately need to receive and be built up in God wants to show us his love his care through others and their love for us as well it's important that we remember that that works both ways the gospel means we can love others the gospel also means we can receive that love as it humbles us to recognize that we don't have everything together by ourselves and just as I got to this point kind of preparing for this morning someone pitched me a book and I flipped it open and it just opened this quote which I think fits so well with what we're closing with here it says the spiritual fellowship that a believer enjoys with his redeemer is not a solitary or selfish joy but one which he cannot possess alone or accept in common with other believers that idea that actually we are supposed to be together we are supposed to receive that love from one another as well as show it to one another because that is how

[ 28 : 34 ] God has put us together as his people and so really I suppose a kind of a dual challenge as we close this morning is that through the gospel through knowing God's love for us that we would be sent out that we would go out and that we would love well but also that that encouragement that we would draw in that we would open up that the love that we have from Jesus would give us the security to receive that love from his people as well again all of that grounded in and standing on that that foundation of that that compassionate costly and committed consistent love that we first receive from Christ let me pray let's pray together let me pray let's pray together Thank you.