

Leaving a Trace of Grace

Luke 10:25-37

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As often happened during Jesus' teaching ministry, many Jews were looking for a loophole in the Law, while Jesus was getting to the heart of the matter. When a lawyer asked Jesus a question about how to be right with God, Jesus knew that the man wanted to hear that He was already doing the right things. But with His divine perspective, Jesus defined what it means to love God and love others. To this day, Christians are set apart from the world when we follow this teaching.

Several years ago, Hugh Rudd, a CBS anchorman and reporter, was mugged just outside his New York City apartment complex. He was beaten and knocked down but remained conscious with his eyes open, but he was unable to move. He was right next to his doorstep but all he could do was moan.

Hours later, after being rescued, he recounted the frightening scene as he lay there, watching people walk past him in the darkness, ignoring his moans for help. He said that even the milkman came, early that morning, set the milk cans down next to him, and walked away. No one stopped to see what was wrong until later that morning.

R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Crossway, 1998), p. 390

I have read in recent days that even 9-1-1 professionals, who have been trained to

respond to people who call in for help, aren't always willing to help.

I read one news report of a woman hiding in a store as an active shooter was on a rampage; she dialed 9-1-1 and whispered for help. Apparently, the operator scolded the woman for whispering and then hung up.

Another 9-1-1 operator received a call from a terrified woman whose car was stalled in a flooded road, and it was filling up with water. It had all happened so suddenly that she was afraid to open her door or window; she called to ask for a rescue and for advice on what to do in the meantime. Instead of sending help, the operator began lecturing her for being foolish enough to drive in the storm, saying the woman should have known

better. She lectured on—until the line went dead and the woman drowned.

Legislators and lawmakers have struggled with this issue of human responsibility, trying to determine when and how people should be willing to help others.

In fact, every state in our country today has created what they officially call Good Samaritan Laws. You can look them up, state by state, as I did this past week.

It's fascinating that the concept behind these laws comes from a conversation Jesus had with a lawyer.

In **Luke 10**, I want us to listen in on this conversation, and let me tell you ahead of time, this encounter should have a direct bearing on your attitude—and mine—to this day.

We're now at Luke 10:25:

And behold, a lawyer stood up and put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Luke 10:25

Now Jesus could have embarrassed him by responding, "You're a lawyer; you should know that you don't *do anything* to receive an inheritance. Somebody died; you're alive; the person who died left you something; you don't earn it, you just receive it, so 'sign here' and have a good day."

Adapted from John Phillips, [Exploring the Gospel of Luke](#) (Kregel, 2005), p. 159

But this wasn't a legal question, this was a theological question.

Dwight Pentecost writes that what this lawyer is really asking is, "How good do I have to be in order to get into Messiah's kingdom and receive eternal life?" Eternal life and the kingdom were one and the same. Asking, "What do I have to do?", is the same thing as asking, "How good do I have to be to get in?"

Adapted from J. Dwight Pentecost, [The Words and Works of Jesus Christ](#) (Zondervan, 1981), p. 299

Now he probably expected Jesus to give him the standard set of rules: follow the traditions of your fathers; obey rabbinical teaching; observe the Jewish ordinances and ceremonies.

This lawyer wants to know how many rules he has to keep in order to get into the kingdom.

So, Jesus gives him a pop quiz here in **verse 26:**

He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

Luke 10:26

This is an open book quiz. Essentially, what does the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—say makes a person right with God, and how do you interpret it? In other words, what does it look like in real life?

Now this was an easy quiz for the lawyer because he already had the answer memorized.

In fact, he prayed the answer every morning and evening like any good Jewish man would have; it came from **Deuteronomy 6:27**.

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.”

Luke 10:27a

Stop there for a moment; the Jewish world at this time believed—just as we do today—that:

- The heart was the center of emotion and desire.
- The soul was the center of consciousness and personality.
- Strength was the place of will and determination.
- The mind was the center of intelligence and cognition.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 278

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 2* (Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1025

So, the greatest commandment in the law wasn't a rule; it was a relationship. It means you love God!

But then the lawyer goes one step further and adds from another passage, found in **Leviticus 19:18**: ***“Love the Lord your God . . . and love your neighbor as yourself.”***

And Jesus says in verse 28:

“You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

Luke 10:28b

It's one thing to quote Scripture, it's another thing to apply Scripture.

Now here's the catch. If Jesus had asked this man, “Do you love God with all your heart?” the man could have said, “Of course I do!” And what could you say to that?

I've had people tell me over the years that they love God, even though they know—and I know—they couldn't care less about God.



When someone says that they love God, what behaviors and patterns do you look at to see if they really do? If someone else looked at your lifestyle, could they tell that you loved God without you needing to say it?

They don't read His word, which means they don't want to hear from Him. They don't pray, which means they don't want to talk to Him. They don't come to church, which means they don't want to worship Him with others or observe the ordinances. But they will swear on the Bible they love God.

So, this lawyer could have easily responded that He loves God. And since

he's dedicated his life to studying the law of God, everybody in the room would have vouched for him, end of discussion.

The trouble is, he added that part about ***loving your neighbor as yourself***. And that's tangible, that's physical evidence you can bring into the courtroom. Jesus can go knock on his neighbor's door and find out about this guy.

It's one thing to say you love God but it's another thing to demonstrate it by loving other people.

He's probably standing here thinking, "Why in the world did He have to add that part about loving my neighbor?!"

What he does next is look for a loophole and it's a clever one; I mean this guy is good—if I needed a good lawyer, this guy would be at the top of my list.

Verse 29:

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10:29

He knows he's in trouble; he knows the evidence won't be helpful; so he stalls for time and asks Jesus for *His* definition of a neighbor.

Now that might sound ridiculous, but you need to know that by the time of Christ, many of the Jewish rabbis had defined a man's neighbor as another follower of God.

So, he's hoping Jesus would agree with that definition and say something like, "Just as the Rabbis have taught for centuries, your neighbor is someone who goes to the synagogue with you, who lives on the same side of the railroad tracks as you do, who looks like you, who votes like you, who likes everybody and everything the same way you do."

And with that, the lawyer could say, "I'm doing that, and I've got a trainload of witnesses in this community who will vouch for me."

Which effectively says nothing more than "I love people who love me; I am loving toward people who are loving toward me."

That's the standard rule of thumb to this day!

A famous rabbi born 190 years before the birth of Christ taught in his best-selling volume and I quote: "If you do good, know to whom you do it. ...Give to the devout, but do not help the sinner. Hold back their bread, and do not give it to them—Give to the one who is good.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1; editor, Clinton E. Arnold (Zondervan, 2002), p.

In other words, love your friends because *they* qualify as your neighbors and then you get to be hateful to everybody else.

But Jesus doesn't buy into the status quo; instead, he begins to tell a story that will radically redefine the definition of a neighbor, and what love looks like out there in the traffic pattern of your life.

He starts in verse 30:

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.”

Luke 10:30

Now everyone listening to Jesus would have immediately resonated with this scene because this story was in their newspapers every other day.

This road from Jerusalem to Jericho was about 17 miles long; it was a rough and rocky thoroughfare winding through areas where caves dotted the hillsides, creating perfect hideouts for bandits.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, wrote that bandits were out there robbing travelers 400 years before the time of Christ.

Bock, p. 1029

In more recent times, King Herod had rebuilt Jericho and turned it into a resort. He had three of his own palaces there, complete with swimming pools and gardens.

Trent C. Butler, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), p. 172

VIPs traveled this road, government officials, religious leaders, wealthy upper-class people heading for a weekend at the resort.

So, this was the perfect place to hijack a caravan of rich people.

In fact, so many people were robbed and injured or killed on this stretch of road that by the time Jesus was telling this story, the road had already been nicknamed The Bloody Road.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 278

People listening to Jesus describe this man nearly beaten to death and robbed would have been shaking their heads and saying, “We know what you’re talking about.”

Jesus says in verse 31:

“Now by chance a priest was going down that road.”

Luke 10:31a

That is, in the same direction. The crowd around Jesus brightens up thinking, how great is that?

This man represented the height of devotion to God; he was considered the servant of God, a man who ministered in the temple of God.

Bock, p. 1030

How fortunate is this? The timing was perfect! Here comes help!

But Jesus continues:

“Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.”

Luke 10:31

That was unexpected. If anybody's supposed to be good enough to get into the kingdom, it's a member of the professional priesthood.

But he passed by on the other side. He literally changed lanes. Why?

We're not told but here's a clue:

Numbers 19:11 informs us that during these Old Testament times anyone who came in contact with a dead body would be automatically unclean for seven days.



Describe a time you felt called to love someone when it was personally inconvenient to you. What did you do?

To this priest, the beaten man looked dead; no need to check his pulse and then have to quarantine for seven days. We know what a pain it is to quarantine! We're not going to volunteer for that.

Bible scholars point out the fact that since Jericho had the largest population of priests living outside of Jerusalem during the days of Christ, this priest was more than likely returning home after having served his tour of duty in the temple.

He's tired; he wants to get home; he's just come from serving God.

To put it into a New Testament context, he was on his way home from church. He'd just sung the hymns of the faith and worshipped with the saints.

He may have preached twice that morning, from the Gospel of Luke; he wants to get home and eat lunch and take a nap and watch some hockey at 3:30!

You don't make appointments in your calendar to be a good Samaritan. You don't schedule convenient times for helping people with their problems. You just show up.

This lawyer had this Bible verse memorized, but he wasn't about to have exercised.

But then again, maybe he thought to himself that he would just leave the task to one of the temple assistants, the Levite. Perhaps he knew that this Levite was also traveling home, a short distance behind him.

Verse 32:

"So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."

Luke 10:32

He changed lanes as well. The audience was still shocked the priest didn't help; but they definitely expected the Levite to help.

Levites served as temple assistants. They had calloused hands—they got dirty and messy. They were built for this sort of thing.

Surely the Levite will help this blood-caked, beaten, naked man and not just leave him out there to die.

The language here gives the sense that he went up closer to the man to look at him more carefully. It's implied he stood there for a moment or two deciding what to do next.

Again, we're not told why he walked away, but listen, let's make sure we don't point fingers too quickly; let's not downplay the danger.

It's possible the thieves were nearby; they might even be waiting for their next victim.

I have no doubt this Levite is looking over his shoulder for any sign of danger. And for whatever reason, he decided it wasn't worth the effort or the risk.

Let me tell you, beloved, the amazing thing in this story isn't that the Priest and the Levite did *not* stop to help. After all, this was a dangerous road, this was the wrong part of town, this was not the place to pull over.

Have you ever been in need and some random stranger stopped to help? It left you surprised and grateful and humbled. It was grace and mercy on exhibit. You have never forgotten it.

I remember when Marsha and I were living in Detroit, Michigan where I was

earning my first seminary degree. Detroit, as you may know, is famous for its safety and low crime!

Marsha had gone to a seminary-wives gathering one evening, and on her way home, long after dark, our old beat-up car broke down once again. It was a green Volare.

Any of you old enough to remember the Plymouth Volare? The Volvo and the Volare are similar—in that they begin with the letter V. That's it.

Well Marsha decided on her way home to cut through a dangerous part of town to save time. And that's when the car broke down. She came to a stop underneath a railroad bridge without any streetlights nearby.

This was before cell phones and GPS.

You can only imagine how afraid she was. She didn't know what to do. There was no way to reach me or anyone else. She wasn't about to get out and walk.

Just then a car pulled up behind her and a young man walked up to her window and asked her if he could help. All she would do was roll her window down 1/8th of an inch and tell him our phone number and ask him to call me.

He explained to her that he was returning home from his wedding rehearsal dinner and was getting married the next day and wouldn't want *his* bride stranded on the side of the road. He reminded Marsha that she wasn't in a safe part of town.

She already knew that.

So off he went to call me and during that time Marsha saw another car coming her way—it slowed down a bit, but then drove away.

It was a police car. But she didn't see him and he didn't see her because when he pulled up she ducked down in the front seat.

A few minutes later, this young man returned, and he even brought her a cup of coffee and promised to wait in his car behind her until help arrived.

Well after he had called me, I called a seminary buddy and told him what was going on. He and his wife didn't even take the time to come pick me up, they just hopped in their car and took off to go get her

The problem was, they traveled the normal route between our apartment and the seminary, not the short cut she had taken.

They couldn't find her.

At one point he made an illegal U-turn to try again, and wouldn't you know it: blue lights began to flash behind him, and he was pulled over.

He explained what he was doing and when he said he was looking for a green Volare, the officer said, "I passed that car; I know exactly where it is."

They all piled back into their cars, drove over to where Marsha was located, and we all lived happily ever after.

Let's not be too hard on the priest and the Levite. They're in the wrong part of town. It is going to take somebody unusually kind to stop and help.

The more I think about this narrative, the surprising thing here isn't that these two men did not stop to help, the surprising thing is that someone did!

Now verse 33:

"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 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."

Luke 10:33-34a

One author commented that Jesus' audience would have expected the Samaritan to finish off what the robbers started!

Adapted from John MacArthur, [Luke 6-10](#) (Moody Publishers, 2011), p. 357

The implication of this story is that this beaten man is a Jew; the Jews and the Samaritans hated one another.

The hatred had grown over several centuries.

So, this parable is about to take an unexpected turn of events.

I want you to notice again that this Samaritan's compassion is comprehensive. *He bandages his wounds*, probably using strips of cloth

from his own turban or tunic. *He poured wine on his wounds*, to disinfect the wounds, and oil to relieve them. By the way, Jews never purchased or received oil or wine from a Samaritan, it was considered unclean. *He set him on his horse or mule*, implying that he now walked instead. *He took him to an inn*— now at this point, most people think the Samaritan paid the innkeeper to take care of him and he took off.

That isn't what happened, **notice again verse 34:**

“Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day...”

Luke 10:34b-35a

That means he took care of him through the night, at the most critical stage in this man's condition, he didn't hand him off he stayed up with him. **Then the next day—verse 35:**

“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.’”

Luke 10:35b

He effectively gives the innkeeper his MasterCard to cover the expenses. Historians believe this would have covered his room and board for nearly one month.

Nobody does that. Nobody does that!

The point here is that somebody who truly knows God and loves God should be the one who *does*.

Now Jesus isn't defining the plan of salvation. He's not saying that if you want to go to heaven, make sure you stop at every accident and help.

No, just as Jesus has responded to several individuals, He knows their heart and He looks at that key element of hypocrisy or rebellion and He points His finger there.

So, Jesus turns to this lawyer and asks him one more question:

“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.”*

Luke 10:36-37a

He can't even bring himself to say, “The Samaritan.”

Bock, p. 1034

He can't get those words out of his mouth in a positive context. He just can't say it!

You see, he's gotten the point, but he will not repent of his prejudice. His pride. His partiality.

He will continue claiming to love God while continuing to hate the Samaritans.

As I studied this parable, I must tell you, the Good Samaritan is presented as a model, not for getting into the kingdom, but how to act like our King.

And in case you've forgotten: Jesus found you, helpless, and hopeless, empty, broken.

Jesus saw you and had compassion on you. He stopped and He stooped to pick you up. He restored your life and put you on your feet. And then He paid all the bills for your spiritual care. And He's even promised to come back again to settle every account on your behalf.

Everything He touches in your life leaves the evidence of love, the trace of grace.



How should this radical understanding of love impact your life today? Considering how you have been loved, how are you going to share that love with someone this week?

John Sutherland, an officer in London's police department, explained this principle in forensic science called Locard's principle of exchange.

Developed by Dr. Edmond Locard, known as the Sherlock Holmes of France, this principle has a simple premise: every contact leaves a trace. In other words, every criminal leaves a trace behind him.

"Wherever he steps, whatever he touches, whatever he leaves, even unconsciously, will serve as a silent witness. Not only his fingerprints or his footprints, but his hair, the fibers from his clothes, the glass he breaks ... the paint he scratches, the blood he leaves behind ... this is evidence that does not forget [he was there]."

Sutherland went on to explain how this principle applies not just to forensic science but to human relationships:

"Every time two people come into contact with one another an exchange takes place. Whether between lifelong friends or passing strangers, we encourage, we ignore, we hold out a hand, or we withdraw it. We walk toward or we walk away. We bless or we curse . . . and every single contact leaves a trace. The way that we treat and regard one another matters—it leaves some kind of trace behind."

John Sutherland, "Every Contact Leaves a Trace," London TEDx (6-22-17)

Children of the kingdom should be known as those who leave behind the trace of grace, the evidence of mercy and love.

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