

# Luke 10:25-37 - State Farm Christianity

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Let me acknowledge something as we get going this morning, and that is, if it's hot in this room, you know it's gotten hot outside. It doesn't get hot in this room very easily, and it is warm this morning. I see your bulletins doing this every time I look out.

But that's how hot it's getting outside these days. We come this morning in our study of Luke to one of the most famous stories that Jesus ever told, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Good Samaritan is fairly common lingo now, right? This story has been picked up in churches and culture, and we know what a Good Samaritan is. It's very familiar to us. In fact, it's so familiar that we could be tempted to think we know the point of the story already. And in fact, that may well not be true. We may only really know part of the story. You'll notice as we read this morning that Jesus tells this famous story as part of a larger conversation that goes well beyond helping the poor into issues of the law of God, life after death, all sorts of things. So note that broader context as we read about Jesus' conversation with a lawyer, a religious leader, teacher of God's law.

It's in Luke 10 at verse 25. This is God's holy, inerrant, infallible word. Behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, what is written in the law? How do you read it? 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 he said to him, you have answered correctly. Do this and you will live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? 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.

[ 2 : 27 ] Now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

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 and took care of him. 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. 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 to him, you go and do likewise. Pray with me as we look to God's word together.

Father, we know this is your word. So we ask for your spirit to come and to teach us. We know that you delight to do that.

And so we come to it expectantly. Expectant that you'll show us more of yourself. That you'll show us more of our hearts. And especially that you will show us more of Jesus.

[ 3 : 50 ] As we know that's what your word does. Speak to us this morning that we may hear from you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Put yourself in the shoes of this lawyer for just a minute this morning.

Now this Jewish lawyer would actually be a religious figure in that culture. So some of you are thinking that's the only way for him to take a step down in my mind. To go from being a lawyer to a pastor.

It's just disastrous. But that's who he is. The law that he studies is the law of God. The early portions of the Old Testament.

He's an expert. He's sharp. He knows his stuff. And perhaps this guy, pretty influential in his town, is not too excited about this new teacher who's shown up.

Some of the things he's saying. So he's out to catch Jesus. To trip him up. To validate his own wisdom and spiritual standing before God, perhaps.

[ 4 : 55 ] As well as before his peers. But he's about to be overmatched by Jesus. So as much as he's an expert in the law, we'll see that he has some distorted views of God's law that come largely from this perspective, this desire in his heart wanting to justify himself.

Luke highlights that motive in his heart in verse 29. He desiring to justify himself. And I can totally relate to this.

You and I may not theoretically believe that we can justify ourselves, make ourselves right with God. Right? We know what the Bible teaches. It's justification by faith alone.

By the grace of Christ alone. That's how we're made right with God. But practically, I often function the way this lawyer is going to in this story.

Look how Luke shows us the lawyer's struggle. Behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, to test Jesus, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

[ 6 : 09 ] And already there, you've got to think there's a little hint of misunderstanding because you don't usually do something in order to inherit something, do you? That's not the way it works in our culture or theirs.

So we're wondering a little bit about this guy's understanding. But Jesus carries on with the conversation. And that doing piece is a big part of it. Jesus knows this guy values God's law. He reads it and teaches it. And so he pushes him to what he knows. Jesus says, what's written in the law? You're an expert. How do you read it? And the lawyer responds, 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 says, you got it. You've answered correctly. Do this and you will live. The lawyer gets it right. He gives this great summary of God's law.

But Jesus says, it's not enough just to know it. You must do it. You must do this and then you will live. When we begin to think we can measure up to God's law, this idea in our hearts of justifying ourselves that we could measure up, one thing we easily fall into believing is that knowing right answers is enough.

[ 7 : 34 ] When I was a kid, I grew up in a Presbyterian church and I could memorize. I could remember things and so I knew Bible verses.

I knew catechism questions and answers and I drilled them and I remembered them and that was wonderful. I'm really thankful for those truths, many of which I still remember today.

Today. What happened, however, that was not as wonderful was that I began to think that I gained some spiritual rank from all of my knowledge and memorization.

I could out-debate nearly anybody around me in theology and explain to them why I was right and they were wrong and quote scriptures and even catechism. They didn't even know what catechism was and I could quote answers to them.

And I began to think that it made me a better Christian than they were. I knew more right answers than they did. I still struggle with that.

[ 8 : 33 ] Seminary just piled on right things to know. So I struggle with having the right answers to spiritual questions. It's a good thing, but I can find my relative significance or security in having those right answers.

And while it's good, it can also be dangerous to our hearts, can't it? To know so many right things and to begin to think that that's what makes you matter to God or to others, it can be dangerous. Jesus is going to make that clear here as we keep talking through this passage. But the next thing we see as he interacts with the lawyer is a different distortion of God's law that's so common when we start to think highly of ourselves.

We see it in verse 29. The lawyer, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, and after all, who is my neighbor exactly?

What's he doing? The lawyer is seeking to narrow the law to make it manageable. He needs to get this one right because he's seeking to justify himself.

[ 9 : 46 ] And in his day, Jewish teachers agreed, it was quite clear, that you were to love your neighbor as yourself. That was part of God's law. What they disagreed on was who was a neighbor.

Almost all of them, in fact, agreed that neighbor was only Jews.

It didn't involve anybody beyond that. It excluded everybody who was a non-Jew. And beyond that, they disagreed. Maybe even further, there were others that might be excluded. Heretics from a different Jewish sect or unclean Jews or other people who just didn't measure up to your standards in some way.

They were not neighbors either. And so the pool of neighbors is shrinking, right? And this lawyer wants to know, this is a debate, Jesus. I want you to weigh in. Who's my neighbor?

Apparently, I've got the loving God part down, and I'm wondering if I've possibly got it on the neighbor too. Can you just make the law manageable for me?

Defined in that narrow way, with specifics as to who the neighbor is, maybe you can keep the law. And so we relax God's standard.

[10:53] We lower it to a point where it seems attainable, where we can measure up and feel good about ourselves. We do this in so many ways, don't we? Often without even thinking about it.

We ask, do I have to tithe on the net or the gross? 10% of which one, because I want to get it right. Right? We convince ourselves in our minds that it's not really adultery because it's just emotional and not physical, so it's really not that bad after all.

We say to ourselves, you know, you can't really love everyone. There's so many people in the world after all. Have you looked around these days? I can't love everybody, so I'll love those that I naturally connect with.

And that'll be what it looks like for me to love my neighbor. And now all of a sudden, with my heart out to lunch, as it were, not engaged in the process, I can stand next to God's law and feel like I've measured up.

I'm pretty good. It's like a husband telling his wife who feels unloved all the things that he's done, the boxes he's checked.

[12:05] And she rightly sees that he has lowered the standard of passionate, sacrificial love from the heart. When we seek to justify ourselves before God, before others, we often rely on our right answers or relax God's perfect standard to something we feel we can reach.

And so it's to people like us, people who have those tendencies in our hearts, who tend to want to justify ourselves and measure up and think we're doing well enough for God or someone else to like us.

It's to people with those heart tendencies that Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. You want to know who your neighbor is?

And especially you want to know who your neighbor's not, Jesus says. Let me tell you a story. And you know the story. It's familiar to you.

A man is traveling along the road when he's robbed and beaten and left to die. And a priest passes by him on the other side. And a Levite passes by him on the other side.

[13:21] But a Samaritan stopped to help. And here's where we need to appreciate some of the shock and offense of what's going on in the story Jesus tells.

Remember, put yourselves in the shoes of the lawyer again. We're feeling pretty good about ourselves. We're wanting to feel even better. That's where our heart is. At the end of this answer, I'm going to feel like I've got it.

If we can just get this technicality about who my neighbor is nailed down, I'll be able to manage it. And Jesus says, but a Samaritan.

And that's the first surprise. Because see, in Jewish culture, there was a typical trio that was included when you told stories. And they would have been expecting this.

There was the priest, the one ordained to the service of God in the temple. And then next in the story would always be a Levite, who was not ordained, but did serve in the administration of the temple.

[14:25] And then the third one, who always came along next, was the Jew. The lay person, the Jewish guy, would be third. And Jesus skips that part.

All the people expecting, ah, the priest blew it, the Levite blew it, I knew those clergy. They failed us again. Now here comes the Jew to come through.

And Jesus says, but a Samaritan. And he's going to go on to hold the Samaritan up as the model, the moral example for the Jew. The Samaritan.

The one with the wrong theology. The bad ethics. That one. Remember them? They don't know God truly.

They don't understand his word. They don't live the way God tells them to. Shocking. The next shock is that the Samaritan cares at all.

[15:24] We know Samaritans generally despised Jews. Further surprising is the extravagant way that he loves this stranger.

Not just checking in on him, stopping to see, but changing his plans, redirecting his life in order to get him to an end, to care for him all night, and providing above and beyond so that this injured man, when he recovers, with no resources left on him, will not have to sell himself into slavery just to recover from his injuries.

Whatever it takes, I'll pay it when I come back. But the final surprise is Jesus' question at the end of the story. It flips the lawyer's question around.

Not who is my neighbor? That's what the lawyer asked, right? Which are the ones I'm supposed to love? Tell me which ones are my neighbor? And Jesus changes that question entirely. What does he ask?

Who do you think, which one of the three proved to be a neighbor, became a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

[16:35] And the lawyer sees it. He heard the story. What word can he not get out of his mouth? Samaritan. He can't even say it.

But he's not blind to the mercy. He sees the mercy in the story and says, yeah, it's the one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, you go and do likewise.

Jesus is saying, you're right again, lawyer. You got the right answer. This is the picture of what my law means when it talks about loving neighbor. And again, Jesus says, go and do.

Many of you will remember the funny ad campaign run in recent years by State Farm Insurance. I'm convinced that what's, I haven't talked to anybody, but you can tell in the campaign what they want you to know is that they're not that company that when you call and something bad has happened, you get this impersonal voice recording that basically tries to avoid helping you and only does exactly what they're contractually obligated to do.

State Farm doesn't want to be that. They want you to believe that who they are is somebody who will personally show up and help and meet your needs, bend over backwards to help their clients.

[17:59] And so in the commercials, you know what happens. People get in all sorts of different binds and all they have to do is sing the little jingle, like a good neighbor State Farm is.

And you snap, there, there, there. And wherever you are and whatever you need, the agent appears magically and takes care of it. They show up in the house, in the car.

They show up with a new roof for somebody, with a sandwich for someone else. I didn't know they even served sandwiches. With a hot tub for another guy. He snaps and it crashes in.

And whatever it is that you need, State Farm is there to meet that need. That's the message, right? You're never gonna be left alone, hung out to dry, because we will always come to help.

And that, we can all agree, coming to help in those kinds of situations is like a good neighbor. That's what a good neighbor is like. A good neighbor is not trying to get off on a technicality, right?

[19:01] Seeing a guy lying in the road and saying, oh, actually, he lives two doors down. No, that's not my neighbor. No, that's not what a good neighbor is like. Being a good neighbor means seeking to help anyone and everyone in any need.

Showing up and meeting needs anytime, anywhere. That's why Jesus is flipping the question, right? Not whom do I have to love, but how do I get to love well?

It's clarifying for us the high standard of God's law. Jesus has been asked to interpret God's law here and Jesus says, it's even higher than you think. It's seeing neighbor love as something not to try to meet a minimum standard for and see what you can get by with, but rather to set my heart on a trajectory to take off in the right direction to love extravagantly beyond what I can afford.

The story of the Good Samaritan is not just teaching us to look out for injured Jewish males when riding a donkey from Jerusalem to Jericho. You're not likely to do that soon.

Now, you get Jesus' point. Go and do likewise. Show mercy. He's teaching us to love everyone in our path. Even our enemies.

[20:22] Even those we don't like. Those we know don't deserve it. Anyone who needs mercy or help in any way to lavish it upon them at great cost to ourselves however we can.

So why not just say that? Answer the question, Jesus. Why tell a story? Why is that necessary? Well, you can think of several reasons.

It's memorable, certainly. But among other reasons, I think it's by the overwhelming nature of the surprises in that story to help the lawyer, his heart, and to help us and our hearts to see what we're missing, to see what causes us to pass by on the other side so often.

See, the Samaritan is the exemplar, right? Right. And so we know enough about the Samaritans to know that that means rightness must go beyond intellectual accuracy and beyond religious formalism because the Samaritan doesn't have either of those.

Priest or the Levite might, but it's got to go beyond those things the Samaritan wouldn't have where you can just check the right boxes and say you've loved. that God calls us to a love so much richer and fuller than we even imagine.

[ 21 : 47 ] It would be similar when God uses the Samaritan. I don't think we have an exact comparison, but similar to God saying to us, aspire to the zeal of the Mormons. Look how they love their neighbors by always sharing their faith.

Or aspire to the generosity of the Catholics caring for the needy. Or aspire to the humility and compassion of the Muslims living among those who don't believe as they do.

That would get your attention, wouldn't it? If that's what God came and said to you. It's a high call. The standard is high. Jesus resists relaxing the standard.

Don't limit who your neighbor is, he says. Rather, dream of how to help anyone and everyone in your path. See, the gospel Luke has been telling us about, we've been saying from the very beginning, is good news of great joy for whom?

For all people. And so if that's true, and if you have that gospel, if you have that good news, then if it's for all people, everyone in your path, when you cross them, should feel a meaningful impact of that reality in some way, that good news should impact them.

[ 23 : 06 ] Now, you've probably not run across a guy to put on your donkey between Jerusalem and Jericho. And there are times where we need to think intentionally about rerouting our paths and going and finding people in need of mercy.

But just think of the people in need of mercy already in our lives. Already in your path. Maybe even this week. Who comes to your mind who is or will be in need.

I'll change some names and details, but while you're thinking, I think of homeless Alana who has shown up at our church office several times in the last several weeks on her bike needing food or water and much more than that.

Needing the dignity of being looked in the eye and respected as a person made in God's image. I think of Mike waiting my table at Buffalo Wild Wings and pretty confident guy all of a sudden finding himself in a situation he has no idea how to manage or whether or not he wants to enter into his girlfriend who's pregnant with his child.

He needs wisdom, friendship, somebody to walk with him. I think of Manny, a Jobs for Life student wanting to provide for his family, but it's hard to feel capable and confident when you're not able to put food on the table.

[ 24 : 39 ] He needs relationship, skills, encouragement. I think of Joe and Sue who live on your street, potentially, drive an SUV and a minivan.

When you walk by, it looks like they're fine. They've kind of got life together. Two kids, you see them out walking the dogs a lot. They both got good jobs. But inside, they're half dead.

They're empty. They're not sure what they're living for and they're not sure they want to anymore. They're needing the mercy of Jesus that brings true life.

I think the new family will be sitting by at school orientation maybe next week. the kid who doesn't know anyone at his new school and needs you to be a friend.

The mom who's struggling with her twin two-year-olds running all over the place while she just wants 30 seconds to meet her first kid's kindergarten teacher. She doesn't know how to do it.

[ 25 : 47 ] And you'll be there and you'll have these opportunities and I think of all these people and the spiritual and relational and physical needs that they have that they don't want people to see so you're not going to see them unless you stop and enter into their lives.

It's so much easier to pass by on the other side to keep going. And we're headed other places to do other really important things and God puts these people in need of mercy on our paths and calls us to be a neighbor to them to the least the lost the littlest the lonely the left out.

We don't need a special program for this. Just open eyes in God's merciful heart. This is the call of God's law on our lives to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Jesus never relaxes God's perfect standard. But God's law does more than show us God's perfection His holy standard.

It does that and then at the same time as it does that when we're willing to look at it head on in all its fullness and difficulty it also reveals to us how far we fall short doesn't it?

[ 27 : 14 ] Remember the context again? Come back to the lawyer. Jesus is revealing the lawyer's heart here isn't He? When He tells him go and do go and do go and do like this the standard is so shockingly high there's no way He can leave the conversation thinking He can meet it and be like a Samaritan in order to get there?

No way! Impossible! I'm not going there! That's true for us. Even if we were magical state farm agents who could show up wherever we wanted to in every situation where everyone is in need and take care of it we wouldn't.

We love ourselves and our plans too much. Someone would cost too much eventually wouldn't they? Someone would be too despicable.

No way am I helping them. No way am I sacrificing my life for that person. So you may stop to love one of the people I mentioned or one of the ones who's come to mind for you but every single one every day sacrificially and lavishly at great cost to ourselves every time even the people we can't stand and really mean every minute of it from love sincerely from the heart no way.

It's a standard Jesus has revealed and we stand condemned right alongside the lawyer when we seek to justify ourselves by going and loving neighbor doing likewise.

[ 29 : 03 ] Jesus really means it when he says go and do likewise. He's not merely being sarcastic but at the same time he knows that that will expose our self-justifying hearts and our self-serving actions.

We too fall short just like the lawyer and it's here we need to remember something about where we are in Luke. we've just turned the corner and it's part of us understanding that the story of the good Samaritan does more than tell us to love needy people it definitely does that but Jesus tells this story to a guy asking about what eternal life and Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem he set his mind to go where where's Jesus going to the cross to suffer and die for his enemies at great cost to himself to show mercy to those desperately in need of it to redirect his path that is headed to glory through suffering and a cross on his way there to love so lavishly that he would not just provide temporarily but that he would meet our greatest needs eternally he truly and fully and perfectly loves his neighbors doesn't he that's what he's in the midst of doing he's the good neighbor who shows up in our need he perfectly therefore meets

God's perfect standard and y'all this is the glory the last thing I want you to see of how the law and the gospel work together it's a whole sermon another time but just a window this is how it works in our lives how God has designed his law in the gospel to change us he sets the standard high we're called to love neighbor and what happens is we then fail to meet the perfect standard but Jesus meets it for us and then connected to him we are recreated to follow him toward that perfect standard that's the design of what it's meant to work like see when I'm trying to justify myself show you a quick little chart every step changes when that's the perspective I'm coming from I relax God's standard remember I lower it so that I think I can meet

God's standard therefore Jesus is not needed in the process and I follow how far only as far as I need to in order to feel good about myself in the new low standard I only have to love the people along the way to the low standard that I've created and so the danger is we're going to miss out on some neighbors Jesus is calling us to love because we've relaxed the standard and we only have to love those people and worse we miss out on Jesus we don't need him for that when we're justifying ourselves but it's entirely different when God justifies when we come in a relationship with God established by what he's done not what we've done we can leave the standard where he said it what he calls us to the standard is never relaxed and then we fall short of that standard and it's why we have to be so grateful that God justifies the ungodly that's from cover to cover of scripture that that's how he works he finds these people who've fallen short of his standard and he makes them right

Jesus comes and perfectly meets the standard perfectly always loves neighbors and then Jesus makes us new and calls us to follow him there towards that standard to be a neighbor to everyone on our path he meets the standard for us y'all not so we can ignore it and carry on with however we

want to live but so that we can follow Jesus on the path of sacrificially loving neighbor which is exactly what God has created us to do and how we're supposed to work if there's no one on your path in need of mercy you're not on Jesus' path you're not actually following him on his path there's all sorts of people in need but as you follow the one who has loved perfectly for you so that your failures to love no longer define your relationship with your father as you follow him you can revel in his love for you and and reflect that love to everyone we need

[ 34 : 10 ] God's help let's pray and ask father it's not just the failures in our lives what really is the problem is our hearts we would like to come to church and say that we love God with all of our hearts and we love our neighbors as ourselves but we see so many other lesser loves in there we need you to change us Jesus we need your love for us to come and be the thing that makes our hearts new and gives us life to actually be able to share love like this with others so change our hearts and then open our eyes send us out of here with a joy we don't have to walk out of here guilty thinking how can we do it all send us out with eyes that are peeled for people who will need your mercy and with a joy that we get to be vessels of it we get to be channels of your mercy to others

Father do that in our hearts and change this community and every other path we walk in because you've changed our hearts we ask it in Jesus name Amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org) in in the world