

Our Next Door Mission

Gospel Proximity: A Call for Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25-37

Mark Vroegop

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 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. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 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. ³⁵ 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.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." Luke 10:25–37 (ESV)

There is a particular equation as it relates to how we live that I'd like for you to think about this morning:

Proximity = opportunity & responsibility

This equation is important on this Sunday because we have just launched our new campus in the Fishers community and because with August comes the start of another cycle of life for many of you. In other words, with a new campus we have just changed the proximity of the 86,000 people who live in the city of Fishers. And with the start of the school year, there is a lot of proximity shift. A new school, new classes, new neighbors, new extra-curricular events, new church activities, and any number of other things create new proximities in our lives.

And with that proximity comes new opportunity and new responsibility.

Our Next Door Mission Vision

The vision for the Next Door Mission was bigger than just a new campus in the city of Fishers. Our vision is for the Indianapolis Metro Area and for the long-term health of our church family. Our vision is to change the spiritual culture of our city and our church by mobilizing our people to multiply.

After we completed the Mission Expansion Project, our pastors and Elders began discussing what we could do in order to keep growing spiritually deeper. We wanted to fulfill the calling of Colossians 1:28 of “presenting everyone mature in Christ.” And we felt the Lord leading us to develop a strategy to reach our city with the gospel because we believed that multiplication would help keep us focused on evangelism and discipleship. We called our strategy The Next Door Mission because we locate campuses in greater proximity to where our people live so that they will take the gospel next door. We developed a compelling video that summarizes this vision: yourchurch.com/nextdoor.

Our church has been passionate for years about reaching unreached people all over the world. And we have a heart to reach underserved people in the Brookside neighborhood on the Near East Side of Indy. And without diminishing our commitment to either of these, we began to dream about strategically reaching the unchurched people in our community. Our research indicated that over 60 percent of people in the Indy Metro Area are not affiliated with a broadly defined “Christian” Church. The roads are way too empty on Sunday mornings!

Our prayer was that, as we set our sights on multiplication through new campuses, it would mobilize us as an entire church to take the gospel next door. Now, we still have a long way to go, but I am thrilled with how the Lord has led us. Let me give you a few highlights and things to rejoice about:

- We have over 300 people attending the Fishers Campus. The median church size in the US today is 75, and a high percentage of church plants fail because of a lack of a substantial core group. College Park Fishers is already larger than most churches in the US thanks to the willingness of our people to go.
- Our Pastors, and Elders are thinking about evangelism, replication, discipleship, and shepherding like never before due to our emphasis on new campuses.
- People in our church are talking more about how to reach their neighbors, and there is a new “buzz” of talk about intentional and missional living. As people thought about Fishers, it also created the thought about their neighbors.
- The Fishers Team, led by Dale Shaw, Chris Beals, and Dustin Crowe, have thought creatively about how to get people more involved, how to keep things simple, and how to reach their neighbors. Their ideas and passion have inspired our staff at North Indy in a number of key areas.
- Our interest in the metro area has created new relationships with church planting movements in our city. You will hear more about this in the weeks to come, but we are developing a partnership with Soma Church, we sent Joseph and Allison Rhea to join the Soma Team this summer, and as a part of our 30th Year Celebration in September, we are going to take a special offering to invest in what God is doing in the central city of Indy.
- While we are talking about the Next Door Mission, we’ve also been able to keep our focus strong on unreached people groups and Brookside. Our Small Group ministry keeps growing, more people are joining the church, our giving has been strong, and we have very exciting things happening in Children’s Ministry and Soul Care. We’ve stayed spiritually healthy.
- And the process of launching has sanctified us as the Lord has stretched us, humbled us, and caused us to step out in faith in ways that are totally new for all of us.

I'm excited about what I see happening in our church through the Next Door Mission. Proximity is creating opportunity and a new sense of responsibility among us.

It seems to me that this idea of proximity is far more important than what we often consider. Or at least proximity as gospel opportunity is something that is easy to forget. And that is why I want to walk through Luke 10 and the story of the Good Samaritan. As we start in Fishers, a new school year, and another season of life, let's think and pray about this issue of gospel proximity.

Who is My Neighbor?

The Good Samaritan is more than a biblical story; it is a metaphor for something that even non-Christians understand. Culturally it means someone who stops to help another person's suffering. A good samaritan is someone who gets involved. A quick search of news stories would highlight a man in Casa Grande, Arizona, who helped a state trooper fend off an attack on an unidentified woman in Oklahoma City who pulled a mother and her two kids out of a car that had just been involved in a serious accident.

However, the story of the Good Samaritan is not just about good deeds and selfless actions. It is a story about how easy it is to miss the essence of true righteousness. It is a story about how the gospel creates opportunity and responsibility in proximity.

The Context

Luke records the story of the Good Samaritan in the middle of a very interesting series of verses. Luke 10 begins with the deployment of 72 disciples to travel from city to city performing miracles and preaching Jesus' message (10:9). There is a warning to the cities Chorazin and Bethsaida because of their lack of repentance (10:13-16). There is a warning to the disciples about being overly excited at the power that they possessed and to instead "rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (10:17-20).

Luke 10:21 is very important for understanding the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus says the following:

*²¹ "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that **you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding** and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Luke 10:21).*

The point is simply that Christianity is often a reversal of what would be expected. The last are first, the humble are exalted, and the outcasts are welcomed. The people one would think are wise and understanding are actually the ones who miss what God is actually saying. In Luke 10:23 Jesus says, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" In other words, not everyone sees or hears what Jesus is talking about. People miss it all the time – even people you would think wouldn't miss it.

Luke 10:25-37 is the parable of the Good Samaritan, and notice what follows. It is the story of Martha's over concern for busy service while Mary is worshipping at the feet of Jesus. Even though the Lord of

the universe is in her home, Martha can only think about getting everyone fed, cleaning up, and why her sister isn't helping her.

Therefore, the context of this parable is the way that the message of Jesus is often missed even though it is right in front of you. In other words, proximity to Jesus' words does not always guarantee that people "get it" and respond in the right way.

Mark it down somewhere in your minds. The parable of the Good Samaritan is not just about helping hurting people. It is about not being spiritually blind to what should be obvious. It is about not missing the heart of the gospel. Sometimes the people closest to the things of God become blinded to what is right in front of them. That's the context.

The Setting

In order to understand the meaning and the application of the parable, you need to understand the setting in which it was told. In verse 25 we are told that a lawyer stood up and asked Jesus a question. It must have been that Jesus was in the midst of teaching, and it is clear that the question is not a genuine one.

Luke calls this man a lawyer. Another word to describe him would be a scribe. Since a very young age this man would have devoted his entire life to the study and application of the Mosaic Law. Scribes were esteemed among the people, and they were connected to the 71-member Sanhedrin, the supreme ruling body in Jerusalem. The scribes gave the Sanhedrin guidance on matters of governance, obedience, and fidelity to the Jewish faith. When this man asks this question, he is trying to trip up Jesus, either to cause Him to lose favor with the crowds or to stumble into blasphemy.

He asks Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is the same question that the Rich Young Ruler asked Jesus in Luke 18:18. It is a good question, one that most Jews were interested in because of their spirituality, but it is not a genuine question coming from a broken heart. This scribe is asking out of pride and self-justification, something Jesus clearly knows.

Jesus must know that he is a scribe, likely because scribes dressed in a way to be sure that everyone knew who they were (see Matthew 23:5). Therefore, Jesus asked him what he believed the Law to teach. Jesus asked a question of his question-asker.

The scribe's answer was to quote the summary of the Law from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. 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" (Luke 10:27).* This was the accepted summation of a person's responsibility to God and to mankind. It was the essence of obedience and the height of righteousness.

Therefore, Jesus told him "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28). Now did Jesus really mean that? Yes and No. Yes, Jesus meant it, that if a person could literally fulfill loving God and loving others, then he would be righteous. However, Jesus knows that this man could never do this, so He is not giving him a path of conversion. Rather Jesus is seeking to expose the scribe's

self-righteousness as Jesus wants the scribe to see his self-trusting righteousness. Jesus wants the scribe to see something he is missing, and that is why Jesus answers this way.

But the conversation is not over. The scribe wants to justify himself. He must have sensed something in Jesus' answer that made him a bit defensive. Therefore, he asked another less than genuine question, "And who is my neighbor?" You can almost hear the smirk in the question, can't you?

The scribe is asking for a qualification on who fits the definition of "neighbor." At this time in Israel's history, not everyone was "qualified" to be considered a neighbor. Don't miss this! The scribe's question implies that loving your neighbor has more to do with who the neighbor is than who he is. His question assumes that people need to qualify as neighbors before they are treated as neighbors. In other words he is not asking what he can do to love his neighbors. No, he's asking who is worthy of his love.

The scribe has placed a filter on his proximity to people as it relates to his concern for them, and he has tied it to spirituality. Jesus is about to blow all that up.

The Parable

Jesus sets up the parable with a random man and without any reference to his rank, race, or circumstances. The man travels the well-known road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which was about 17 miles, the distance between downtown Fishers and downtown Indy. In the course of his journey, he is attacked by robbers, beaten, stripped bare, and left half dead.

The scene changes dramatically in verse 31, when "by chance," a priest travels the same road. Now the parable has some "bite" to it because of the categories of people involved. Remember, that was the scribe's question in the first place: Which kind of person qualifies as my neighbor? Jesus uses categories against him.

A priest was intimately involved in the spiritual life of temple worship. He would have been a descendent of Aaron, and his life would have been given to sacrifices, the maintenance of the temple, and especially to purification.¹ Priests, by virtue of their role, would have been intimately involved in everything connected to the worship of the One True God. However, when the priest sees the injured man on the road, he crosses the road and passes by on the other side.

Now we do not know exactly why he did this. Jesus doesn't supply the motivation for his lack of concern. Some commentators suggest he was concerned about purification since touching a dead body would have made him unclean. Others suggest that he was concerned about his own safety. We are not sure. All that we know is that a professional religious leader walked to the other side of the road. The priest clearly did not think that a half-dead man was his neighbor.

Jesus then adds another person into the mix, a Levite. This is a broader term for a descendent of the tribe of Levi, and the Levites were those who assisted the priests in their service. During the days of

¹ Stein, Robert H. *Luke*. Vol. 24. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992. Print. The New American Commentary.

the tabernacle, it was the Levites who carried the furniture, maintained the curtains, and/or erected the frames. In the temple days, they carried on various duties as assistants. The point is simply that this man was also involved in worship services. He too, according to verse 32, "saw him and passed by on the other side."

So, we have two men who are involved in what is supposed to be true spirituality who walk on the other side of the road when a man is clearly in need. The crowd was waiting for a hero. I wonder whom they expected? A common Jewish man? A scribe? A woman? No one anticipated what came next.

³³ *But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. (Luke 10:33)*

I'm pretty sure you could have cut the tension with a knife in that moment. I would have loved to have seen the face of the scribe at this moment. A Samaritan is going to be the hero! This is a problem because no one would have thought of a Samaritan as being a neighbor, let alone a Good Neighbor.

Samaritans and Jews have a long history that goes back over 700 years before the birth of Christ. When the Assyrians conquered Samaria, they repopulated Palestine with non-Jewish people. Over time those people inter-married with the Jews, and they were called Samaritans. When the people of Israel returned from Babylon, the Samaritans offered to help in the reconstruction, but they were rejected. Eventually, they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. That is what is behind the Samaritan woman's question in John 4:19-20 when Jesus meets her at a well. The Samaritans and Jews had been at odds for centuries, and each thought themselves to be superior.

And yet, it is a Samaritan that becomes the center of this parable. Notice what he does:

- He saw him and had compassion (v. 33).
- He went to him and cared for him (v. 34).
- He cared for the man in a costly way (v. 35a).
- He took on ownership and risk (v. 35b).

Notice how different the Samaritan's response was in comparison to that of the religious leaders. The priest and the Levite felt no compassion, moved away from the man, and failed to do anything. And the man who wasn't really even considered a neighbor became the Good Neighbor.

With the story completed, Jesus turns again to the lawyer and asks (v. 36), "*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*" The answer was obvious, but notice that the lawyer does not say, "the Samaritan." No, instead he says "*The one who showed him mercy*" (v. 37). Jesus had answered the man's question and proved His point very clearly.

Therefore, Jesus concludes with the simple command: "*You go, and do likewise*" (v. 37).

Proximity People

The Good Samaritan parable is powerful because it shines a spotlight on the connection between true spirituality and the opportunity and responsibility related to proximity. Jesus exposed the lawyer's self-righteousness and self-justification by illustrating how even the wise and understanding (Lawyers, Priests and Levites) can miss what should be obvious.

Stated positively, true righteousness is loving God and loving one's neighbor. And the expression of that is with people in proximity to you. In other words, if you understand that you have been treated in a way that you do not deserve, it should affect the way you treat people in your "path" of life. I have a different opportunity and responsibility to people with whom I have contact and interaction. They are my "neighbors," and loving God means loving them.

However, the strange thing about proximity is that it is easy to overlook. While we should never stop reaching unreached people and underserved people, we can walk by and drive by a mission field that is right next door. And if we are honest, it is often easier to be "concerned" about people we don't even know than it is the people next door.

Do you know why? Because proximity people are not predictable. They don't go away. Their problems bleed into your life. They ask questions about the gospel. They see how you live. And getting involved is going to mean more time, energy, and mess than with people who live somewhere else.

And yet somewhere inside of the heart of a Christian there is this really good and nagging thought: "I moved into this neighborhood for a reason" or "God has a plan for me at work beyond a paycheck." And He does. The heart of Christianity is seeing that **proximity = opportunity and responsibility**.

The people who are near us, around us, next to us, and in our lives are our neighbors, and that is an amazing opportunity. The best plan for evangelism is people who love Jesus talking about Jesus wherever they are. And it also means that no one is able to reach the people in proximity to you better than you. You are best suited to love your neighbors because they are your neighbors!

So why don't we embrace this mindset more fully? What barriers stand in our way? Let me offer a few common reasons that make us more like the Levite and Priest than the Samaritan. Here are a few reasons why we might not embrace proximity = opportunity and responsibility:

- **Spiritual Pride** – it is possible to think that you are spiritual enough or that you have "done your duty" in other areas so that reaching out to people is justified as not a priority in your life. We can develop a "I-gave-at-the-office" or "I-serve-at-the-church" spiritual mindset.
- **Selfishness** – While hard to admit, it may be that a lack of concern for the needs of others is simply a matter of being selfish and being focused on your needs, your life, your agenda, and your plans.
- **Lack of Love** – Some people do not reach out to others because they do not feel anything in their heart for those who are near them. They have developed a calloused heart.

- **Busyness** – In a culture with “Disneyland” opportunities, our lives can be so full that we do not make time or take time to invest in the people in our proximity. The absence of margin dulls our proximity vision.
- **Insecurity** – Being a good neighbor can mean stepping out of one’s comfort zone. The opportunities that come with proximity can be intimidating as you engage with people who are different than you and whose needs may challenge you. The Next Door mission implies risk, and that can be scary.
- **Assumptions** – One of the ways that we close our hearts to people is either assuming that we know how they are going to respond or assuming that it is someone else’s responsibility to help. Or we can think that someone else is better suited or more qualified to get involved.
- **Mission-creep** – It can be easy over time to forget why God has placed us on the earth and the beauty of His grace to us. We can settle into a pattern in which we are just living, surviving, working our jobs, hanging out with friends, raising kids, and saving for retirement. And we can just forget that Jesus gave us a mission and a calling.

So, let me ask you: Are you seeing anything like this in your life? Do you see elements of the Levite, the Priest, or the Scribe in your heart? Has God providentially placed you in close proximity to someone whom you’ve not embraced? Is it helpful to be reminded about your real mission in life?

You see, a major reason why we launched a campus in Fishers is to keep the mission of making disciples personal, local, and incarnational. God’s plan to reach the world is you, where you live, sharing and living the gospel. Our Next Door Mission intent is to mobilize our entire church to see where we live, where we work, where we travel, where we eat, where we go to school, where we work out, and a host of other areas differently.

Every single day there are countless, divinely ordained opportunities right in front of us. *If we will see them.* What’s more, we have a responsibility because God has gathered us together at this church, in this city, in this moment in church history. But why? Why you? Why here? Why now?

Part of the answer to that question is what we are calling our Next Door Mission. And that mission doesn’t just happen inside this facility; it happens mostly as the gathered church is sent out in the world, taking the light of gospel, love for God, and love for neighbor with us.

So, let’s pray today that God would send us out with a new appreciation for how proximity = opportunity and responsibility.

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