

What's in My Backpack? (Two Guesses)

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Approx. 24 minutes

Luke 10:25-37

- ²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- ²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”
- ²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”
- ²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”
- ²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”
- ³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”
- ³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”
- ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Good Samaritan.

Maybe the most famous parable in the Bible.

We use this term all the time, even today, throughout our culture:

The MSPCA reports on some abandoned pet, and the story always says

something like, *This little guy was rescued by a Good Samaritan, who brought him to our animal hospital.*

Where did this Good Samaritan story come from?

You know that in our Bible, 4 different people wrote biographies of Jesus:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (We call them the gospels.)

These 4 guys had different perspectives; they focused on different

audiences, or different objectives, and therefore different aspects of

Jesus' life and ministry.

Luke was a physician by trade.

So it's no surprise that he's the only one of the four gospel writers to

include this story,

because it's about a medical emergency.

Let's look at the situation that prompted Jesus to make up this story.

Leaders of the religious system back then were always testing Jesus with

trick questions, to see if they could get in an argument with him or get

him to trip up.

So in one of these encounters, Jesus says, basically, the most important

guidelines in life are *Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.*

But this lawyer comes back with, OK, define *neighbor*.

This guy wants to find some technicality that will let him avoid love —

because he has some neighbors he doesn't really want to love.

Haha! I can't imagine that, can you? We all have wonderful neighbors, don't we?

So to answer this challenge, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, which we just heard.

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,

Actually, you go up, north and east, from Jerusalem to Jericho, but Jerusalem has a high altitude, 2,300 feet above sea level, and Jericho lies down in the broad green valley of the Jordan River, just 6 miles from the Dead Sea, which is 1,300 feet *below* sea level — so people always talked about going “down” from Jerusalem to Jericho.

when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

Ah, typical. This road is less than 20 miles long, but it's notoriously dangerous.

The road is so twisty and rocky, bad guys can easily hide out in the cliffs and around the corners and jump you before you know what hit you. History tells us that even 300 years after Christ, this road was nicknamed “Bloody Way” because it was still so *crime-ridden*.

As recently as the 1930s, tourists were warned not to be on this road after dark because a major bandit controlled the area and excelled in carjackings.

They couldn't catch him and his gang because they always zipped back up into the mountains too quickly.

So Jesus is talking about the harshness of real life here.

The story of the Good Samaritan that we take for a nice, sweet “parable” from Jesus, is actually like a harsh review that we would pick up on TripAdvisor or Yelp or somewhere else on social media something today.

But this isn’t just a story about a guy who got in trouble.

This guy, in his situation, was *repulsive*.

He was a medical mess; he was going to be a burden to whoever came along and helped him.

This crime victim in Jesus’ story represents *anybody I want to avoid*:

1. the person who has offended me and I don’t want to deal with them;
2. or the person who’s got some idea about how I should do things differently, and they’re so hot about it and being so dogmatic about it, that I’m sick of them;
3. or the person who’s become so whiny and negative, always complaining, that they’re draining my battery.
4. Maybe someone in my family.
5. Maybe someone in my *church* family.
6. Maybe someone I share a workspace with.
7. Someone I have to deal with every darn day.

How do I deal with them, when I really feel like avoiding them?

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

Who’s the priest? He’s a religious person, or a political person. Someone who’s committed to some system of belief.

But any belief system that cuts me off from relationships with people,
rather than bringing me *into* relationship with people,
is a belief system that has gone astray.

It may have started out honorable, you might even call it godly,
but somewhere along the line,
you left the tracks
and set out on your own self-serving agenda.

*The policies of our political parties today might need to be scrutinized
in the context of this parable Jesus shared.*

So this deterioration of one's belief system is what happened to this priest.
In those days the priests rotated their service in the temple every week,
and it was a great honor to serve in the temple. You didn't want to
miss your turn.

But if you touched a dead person, according to Old Testament law
(Numbers 19:11), you were ceremonially unclean for 7 days.

It was like testing positive for Covid. There's a quarantine period.

If the priest went over and checked on the traveler and the guy turned out
to be dead, the priest would be in quarantine for a week.

And especially awful: if he was up for the temple rotation, he would lose his
place.

Nothing wrong with the rotation idea; nothing wrong with serving in the
temple.

But this priest let his commitment to a belief system become more
important than loving someone in need.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed

by on the other side.

The Levites were religious leaders by virtue of their birth.

They were from a certain tribe of the nation of Israel.

You couldn't become a Levite; you had to be born one.

I would say the Levite represents the times when we distance ourselves
from relationship with people, from care for people, from community
with people,

not because of what they do

but because of who they are

or where they come from.

It's called pigeon-holing,

and I'm the worst in the world at this.

I do it all the time.

It can be very subtle.

How many times have I characterized someone negatively and attached to
my characterization

their race or their ethnicity?

or their sexual identification?

or their age bracket?

or their physical appearance?

Like if I'm complaining about your neighbor:

"Yeah, my Hispanic neighbor was parking his vehicles in his front yard, so I
called the cops on him."

This is racism.

I'm connecting his race or ethnicity to my negative impression of his behavior.

Or do I find myself having a “Well, that figures” kind of response in my mind when I hear about someone’s experiences, and I connect their experience to their religious background?

“She did what? Well, there’s that Baptist mentality for you.”

“Well, that’s how those Catholics are.”

“Well, that’s those Hindus. Those Muslims. Those Mormons. Those Jehovah’s Witnesses. Those — God forbid: Episcopalians.”

Maybe I don’t even say it out loud. I just do that pigeon-holing routine in my heart, privately.

Or it can be geographical: “You know, people from Wisconsin are like that.”

“Those Texans.”

“Ah, people from Texas aren’t the worst. The worst are those morons from...”

Ah, you filled in the blank, didn’t you!

This Levite in Jesus’ story reminds us to be on the lookout for this insidiously subtle “racism of the heart” which infects us all.

If I set up any kind of a relational barrier —

if I auto-sort people into certain categories by their race,
or their cultural background,
or their religious background,

or their age,
 or how they dress,
 or whatever —

I'm not living a life of love.

My own heart is shrinking, not growing.
 And I'm the loser — just as much as they are.

I'm the priest in this story
 if I avoid you
 or reject you
 because you've done something I can't live with.

I'm the Levite in this story
 if I avoid you
 or reject you
 BEFORE anything happens,
 simply because of what I *expect* from you.

So the priest and the Levite are two “super-examples” that cover the whole spectrum of excuses I make for NOT expressing love to the people in my life.

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

Now the Samaritans, in that culture, were the scum of the earth.

The Jews hated them because they had Gentile blood.

The Gentiles hated them because they had Jewish blood.

In those days, if a Gentile wanted to put down a Jew, he would call him a Galilean — because Galilee was regarded as hillbilly country.

And if a *Jewish* person wanted to put down another Jewish person, he would call him a Samaritan.

In the typical joke or story of the day, if a Samaritan character showed up, he was either the villain or the moron.

But in Jesus' story, the Samaritan is a hero.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

So then, having finished the story, Jesus says to the lawyer:

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Can I love you if you don't share my sexual orientation?

Forget about sexual orientation: Can I love you if you're unethical?

Can I love you if you're an alcoholic, or a drug abuser?

If you're hostile toward my religious faith?

Or here's how it is in our churches, a lot of the time:

He's a Christian, supposedly!

How can he do such a thing and call himself a Christian?

I'm watching out for THAT jerk.

She's supposed to be a Christ-follower?

And she acts like THAT?

You gotta be kidding.

I'm keeping my distance from THAT one.

Conflict happens? My instinctive response is: Avoid that person next time.

Conflict happens? The last thing I feel like doing is loving my neighbor.

That person has become repulsive to me, in the literal sense of the term:

I want to pass by on the other side.

I want to avoid dealing with that situation.

In my home, with my family....

When my wife makes a mistake (not that she ever does), my instinctive response is to snap at her.

My kid makes a mistake, *zing!* My instinct is to zap 'em.

My sibling, my parent, someone I'm identified with, so it feels like what they do reflects on me, and they say or do something that embarrasses me — my instinct is POW! I want to lay into them.

But Jesus is bringing me a different idea here.

He has a different perspective on the people who are repulsive to me, who annoy me or frustrate me.

He says,

Hey, let's bring some healing to this person.

He looks at the world and says,

Let's lay out some relational line.

Let's protect our relationships and build community.

Let's live in the power of love.

This is why, the way Jesus made up the story, this Samaritan was carrying
oil and wine in his backpack.

The most valuable commodities,

*two of **the most effective healing agents** available in that culture.*

What do we know about oil and wine?

Jesus was referring to olive oil, in the culture of the day.

National Geographic carried a story on olive oil. Here's what it said:

You can burn it, wash with it, lubricate squeaky hinges with it.

Cosmetics are based on it, diamonds polished with it.

Kings, babies, and the dying are anointed with it.

It's loaded with vitamin E.

It has no cholesterol.

It's an amazing preservative,

keeping fish, cheese, and even wine good for years....

And, of course, you can eat it.

For 4,000 years it has served the Mediterranean cultures as everything
 from money to medicine.

It is, simply, the most versatile fruit juice ever squeezed.

But making olive oil is terrible work.

I am quoting a *National Geographic* writer here, who lived and worked with
 a family of olive farmers while she was writing the story.

“Behind every bottle of olive oil,” she says, “is a troupe of tired people in old clothes.”

It takes 40 lbs. of olives to make 1 gallon of oil.

That means you pick 2 tons (4,000 lbs.) of olives to make 100 gallons of oil.

No matter how mechanized the process becomes, it’s still basically the same as it was 6,000 years ago:

Yank the olives out of the trees,
crush them, pit and all, into a brownish paste,
press the paste to separate the solids from the liquid,
and what drips out of the pressing is oil and water.

The oil rises to the top.

The process of making wine is even more exacting.

The grapes are picked and crushed,
then depending on the color of the grapes
and the type of wine you want,
you either leave the skins in
or take them out,
and let the gunk sit and ferment.

You also have to decide how long to let the fermenting take place —
anywhere from a few months to a number of years —
and what kind of container you want the fermenting to take place in, since
certain woods will influence the flavor of the wine.

It’s an art form as much as a science.

Both oil and wine require heavy *investment*.

But both are WORTH the investment because they have such remarkable, valuable qualities.

When Jesus wanted to paint a picture of someone showing mercy to someone else, he invented a story about someone who carried oil and wine with them.

Healing agents.

This person had the stuff ready, and they were quick to use it when it was needed.

Even when the person who needed it was *way, way outside their comfort zone*.

I need to carry oil and wine.

It's a recipe for relational health, for spiritual health.

I need to be equipped and ready with healing agents,

so when I get into a conflict situation, my instinct isn't to avoid —
or pretend there's not a problem —
or lash out...

but rather, I have **a heart full of oil and wine,**

so I might be able to offer healing and hope to that person or in that situation.

How can we make this practical?

How can we actually learn to carry oil and wine?

If you want to jot some notes, okay.

If you want to visit the church's webpage, FCCOE.org, it will be there in the sermon section. And I'll post a link to it on my Facebook page.

In any case, here are some ideas for your consideration — and I feel like these suggestions may be even more valuable if you pick them up later online, because this is a lot to process in a 20-minute talk:

1. When someone comes up with a stupid idea —

instead of avoiding the subject, or saying “That’s a stupid idea!” — maybe I could try this:

“Help me understand...”

2. When someone is pushing an idea that I feel is problematic —

instead of avoiding the subject, or saying, “Stupid idea!” — maybe I could try this:

“May I push back on that?”

3. When I want to offer a perspective or comment that I’m afraid might be met with ridicule —

instead of avoiding the subject and not offering the idea or comment at all — maybe I could try this:

“I’d like your permission to try out a related idea.”

4. When there’s some uncomfortable issue that needs to be addressed but everybody’s avoiding it — maybe I could try this:

“I think there’s an elephant in the room. Can we talk about it?”

5. When someone in the conversation is whining, blaming, or complaining, but nobody is offering constructive input on the subject —
instead of just letting that continue, instead of avoiding the issue, or even participating in it — maybe I could try this:

“How can we get on the solution side of this? Here’s an idea!...”

6. When there’s something serious going on—

I told someone something difficult or uncomfortable, but there’s really something even *more* difficult or uncomfortable—

when the hardest part of the hard truth *still needs to be said* —

instead of stopping short of what really needs to be said, to get to the bottom of the matter —

maybe I could try this:

“May I give you the last 10%?”

7. After I’ve had a difficult encounter with someone —

instead of avoiding the issue and just *hoping* that I haven’t damaged the relationship or hurt their feelings —

maybe I could try this:

“Are we all right with each other?”

Can we still be all right with each other?

How can we stay all right with each other? *That’s what I really want.*”

* * *

This is way more important than just playing nice in the sandbox.

This is not just about the other guy, the one I’m upset with.

This is about my heart. My health.

If I let myself do what I *feel*/like doing, which is to avoid — or in some cases, I feel like pouring salt and vinegar into the wound — I will not just do damage to the other person.

I will corrode my own spirit.

But if I will do the hard work of carrying oil and wine,
if I will make the investment necessary to learn a new way of talking and relating with others,

I can offer help and healing — and I will grow in that love.

I'll be more at peace. I'll live in greater joy.

It's a different kind of life.

These 7 suggestions I've made — this idea of oil and wine — is not a magic formula. Sometimes, it doesn't "work."

I pour out all the oil and wine I've got, and that person is still hurting, or hurtful, or both — angry, belligerent.

I've been there just this past week, with a longtime acquaintance of mine.

Sometimes it turns out in the situation of the moment, I'm not the person who can serve as the Good Samaritan.

But still, love is how I'm designed to live.

I'm healthier for having given it a shot.

So the next time I face a conflict situation, this will still be the key question, all over again:

How about some oil and wine? Will I give it a try? Will I make the investment?

Will I administer oil and wine in moments of conflict and stress and pain and frustration?

If I learn to carry oil and wine, and use it liberally, I will get stronger, healthier, happier.

This is the power of love.