

THE PARABLE OF **THE GOOD SAMARITAN**



INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus often used parables—simple, vivid word pictures drawn from everyday life—to communicate deep spiritual truths. Many of these stories were brief observations about ordinary events, objects, and people. Yet they carried profound insights into the nature of God's kingdom.

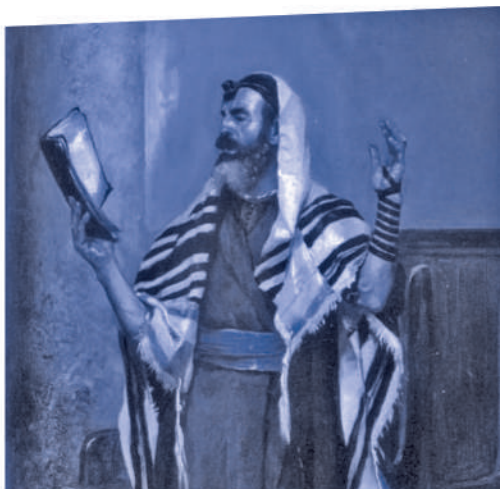
In short, Jesus' parables had a clear twofold purpose: They hid the truth from *self-righteous or self-satisfied people* who imagined themselves to be too sophisticated to learn from Him, while revealing the truth to eager souls who sought righteousness with childlike faith.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25–37**) stands as one of Jesus' most well-known and radical teachings on love and mercy, which redefined neighbourliness. To call someone a Good Samaritan is a noble compliment. But our familiarity with this parable may lead us to believe that we know the story better than we do.

The parable is much more than a story about doing good to strangers. Jesus exposes the lawyer's self-righteousness and prejudices about inheriting eternal life to his own efforts. In the same way, the parable can expose our own prejudices. *Who is the person you unconsciously disregard—the one whose goodness seems inconceivable to you? To acknowledge them as your Samaritan is to step into the true depth of Jesus' parable.*

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Like a diamond set in a gold ring, this parable is framed within **two rounds** of conversation between Jesus and a lawyer - an expert in religious law (*not to be confused with modern-day legal professionals*). If we separate the parable from this surrounding dialogue, we risk missing key elements that are essential to understanding its full meaning.



With reference to **Luke 10:25-37**, the passage is *condensed to its core themes*, and the dialogues are as follows:

Round one: A lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test and said,

Lawyer: (Question 1) *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Jesus: (Question 2) *"What does the Law say?"*

Lawyer: (Answer to 2) *"Love God and your neighbour."*

Jesus: (Answer to 1) *"Do this and live."*

Round Two: The lawyer desiring to justify himself, said,

Lawyer: (Question 3) *"Who is my neighbour?"*

Jesus: (Question 4) *"A certain man went down from Jerusalem..."*

"Which of these three became a neighbour?"

Lawyer: (Answer to 4) *"The one who showed mercy on him"*

Jesus: (Answer to 3) *"Go and continue doing likewise."*

The conversation between Jesus and the lawyer consists of **eight speeches**, organized into two clear rounds of discussion. Each round includes two questions and two answers, with both rounds following the same structured format. In each round, it is the lawyer who initiates the conversation with a question, but Jesus responds with a counter-question. Then the lawyer himself proceeds to answer Jesus' question in both cases. Finally, each round concludes with Jesus offering an answer to the lawyer's original question.

ROUND ONE

At the heart of the lawyer's inquiry is the question, "***What must I do to inherit eternal life?***" and this seems problematic from the outset. Inheritance, by definition, is not something earned; it is received. Only those who are rightful heirs can inherit. In other words, the question reflects a misunderstanding: **eternal life, like all true inheritance in Scripture, is not earned by works but granted by grace.**

The lawyer's question reveals a deeper issue. He treats eternal life as something he can earn by doing good. But eternal life is not a reward for good behaviour. It is a gift that comes from having a relationship with God.

Nevertheless, the language of inheritance is not foreign to the Old Testament. It often appears in connection with Israel's possession of the Promised Land. This inheritance was never depicted as something Israel earned through military might or moral superiority. Rather, it was consistently described as a gift freely given by God, an expression of **His covenant faithfulness.**

Here, Jesus challenges the lawyer's thinking. He directs him back to the heart of the Law—using the lawyer's own words. **love God and love your neighbour as yourself.** This answer is correct. But there is a deeper truth. **No one can truly live this out without God's help.**

The lawyer does not realize that eternal life is received only through mercy. Perhaps he does not want to depend on mercy. In fact, he may not even understand what mercy truly is. Instead, he lives by a different principle—trusting in his own efforts and abilities to appear righteous before God.

In essence, what Jesus tells the lawyer, is this: *"You want to inherit eternal life by doing something? Then love God and your neighbour completely—all the time, with everything you are."* There are no limits or conditions given. The big picture behind Jesus' statement that says, *"Do this and live"* is about **complete obedience to the Law.**

In the New Testament, both Jesus and Paul affirm that full obedience to God's law leads to righteousness. But in practice, they also agree that no one is capable of complete obedience. Therefore, the way of the law becomes ineffective, not because the law is flawed, but because human nature is unable to meet its demands. This becomes even clearer in **Luke 18:18–30**, where Jesus gives a similar response to another question about eternal life. The crowd reacts by asking, *"Who then can be saved?"* Jesus answers, *"What is impossible with men is possible with God"* (**Luke 18:26–27**).

This is the theological tension embedded in the narrative: **the Law is spiritual (Romans 7:14)**, and its demands transcend mere external conformity. **It calls for a heart-level obedience that cannot be mustered by self-effort alone.** As Paul later articulates in Romans 8:3-4, what the law could not do—because it was weakened by the flesh—God did by sending His Son, so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but **according to the Spirit.**

In essence, Jesus is holding up a mirror to the lawyer—and to every hearer—demonstrating that **no one can truly fulfil the law without divine transformation.**

The command to love is not reduced or dismissed, but its fulfilment requires the regenerating and empowering work of the Holy Spirit

Jew vs Samaritan

In the time of Jesus, the relationship between Jews and Samaritans was strained by centuries of tension. The Jewish people viewed Samaritans as both racially impure and spiritually compromised. This belief came from history: after the Assyrian conquest of Israel's Northern Kingdom in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:6), many Israelites were exiled, and those who remained intermarried with foreign nations.

Their descendants—the Samaritans—developed a blended identity, combining Jewish beliefs with pagan practices. As a result, they were seen by the Jews as a "mixed race" with corrupted religion. In return, the Samaritans held deep resentment and hostility toward their Jewish relatives.

To Jesus' listeners, the idea of a Samaritan helping a Jewish victim would not only have been unlikely but shocking, given the mutual hatred between the groups.

Yet it is exactly this unexpected twist that Jesus uses to challenge social norms. Jesus didn't tell this story in isolation. Throughout His ministry, He regularly included Samaritans in ways that overturned conventional prejudice: He offered "living water" to a Samaritan woman. He praised a Samaritan leper who returned to thank Him. He rebuked his disciples when they wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village.

Each of these moments underscores a powerful truth: **in God's kingdom, grace defies social boundaries.**

(Galatians 5:14-16). The lawyer should have responded not with self-justification, but with confession: *"Lord, I cannot love like that. Help me."*

ROUND TWO

The first part of the conversation ends, but the lawyer still thinks he can earn eternal life by his own efforts. He knows he must love God, but he is unclear about the second part: *"Who is my neighbour?"* He hopes for a clear definition, perhaps a short list of people like family or friends. If the list is small, he believes he can manage it. So, he starts the second round, seeking limits he can meet easily.

Jesus responds to the lawyer's question by creating the classic story known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It unfolds like a poem of **seven scenes** and is known as a *"parabolic ballad."*

1. *A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he*

love God & love your
Neighbour



was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

- 2. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.*
- 3. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*
- 4. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.*
- 5. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.*
- 6. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.*
- 7. 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.'*

The first three scenes focus on the **robbers, the priest, and the Levite**, each following a pattern: they *come, act, and leave*. The **Samaritan**, surprisingly, breaks this pattern by staying and showing compassion.

From there, the story lists **seven actions** he takes to help the wounded man. This list is long because the Samaritan makes up for everyone else's failures. He reverses their actions: the Levite could have given first aid (oil and the wine), which the Samaritan does; the priest could have transported the man, which the Samaritan does; the robbers stole and abandoned him, but the Samaritan pays for his care and promises to return. The heart of the story is the Samaritan's unexpected compassion.

THE ROBBERS

The seventeen-mile descending road through the desert from Jerusalem to Jericho has been dangerous all throughout history. It was used primarily by Jewish people to commute. The Samaritans hardly used this road. The story intentionally leaves the man who is travelling on that road undescribed. Yet a Jewish audience would naturally assume that the traveller is a Jew. The Robbers beat him, stripped him, and left him *"half dead."* They took everything from him. He was unconscious and stripped. These details are skilfully constructed to create the tension that is at the heart of the drama.

The Middle Eastern world was and is made up of various ethnic-religious communities. A traveller is able to identify strangers in two ways. He can talk to the unknown man on the road and identify him from his speech,

How do you read?

The lawyer claimed to know the Hebrew Scriptures well. When Jesus asked him, *"What is written in the Law, and how do you read it?"* he gave the right answer: *Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.* Jesus praised him for that.

But here is the issue — while the lawyer knew the words of the Law, he missed its true meaning.

So instead of debating, Jesus tells a story — the parable of the Good Samaritan — which closely echoes a real event from the very Scriptures the lawyer had studied.

In 2 Chronicles 28:5–15, after Israel defeats Judah, they take many Judeans as captives. But the prophet Oded warns them not to enslave their fellow Israelites. Surprisingly, Samaritan leaders listen. **They care for the captives, dress their wounds, give them food and clothes, place the weak on donkeys, and return them to Jericho** — the same location mentioned in Jesus' parable.

Now look at Jesus' story in Luke 10: a Samaritan finds a wounded Judean, tends to his wounds, puts him on his animal, and takes him to safety in Jericho — at his own expense.

Jesus isn't just telling a fictional story; He's reminding the lawyer of a real one — a story already in his Bible.

He's saying: You already know this kind of mercy. Your ancestors lived it. Even your enemies practiced it. Now go and do the same.

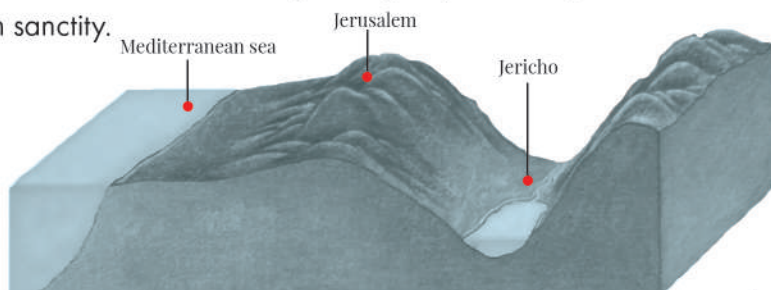
or, even before that, he can identify him by his clothing. But in this story the man was unconscious and stripped naked by the robbers, which making it difficult to identify his ethnicity. He was thereby reduced to a mere human being in need.

THE PRIEST

The temple in Jerusalem was served by three classes of people. Priests comprised the first, the second were the Levites, and third were laymen who helped with various activities in the temple. All three are important to the story. The priest was on his way down the mountain from Jerusalem to Jericho. Many of the priests in the first century lived in Jericho. They would go up to Jerusalem for a two-week assignment and then return to their homes in Jericho.

The priest was almost certainly riding a donkey. In the Middle East no one with any status in the community takes a seventeen-mile hike through the desert. The poor walk. Everyone else in general, and the upper classes in particular, always ride.

The priest likely wanted to help the man on the road, but the fear of becoming ceremonially unclean—and unfit to serve at the altar—held him back. Thus, the priest was struggling with the tension between being a good man and maintaining ritual purity. He sought to avoid sin and attain sanctity.



THE LEVITE

The Levite is of a lower social class than the priest and may well have been walking. In any case, he could have rendered minimal medical aid even if he had had no way to take the man to safety. The Levite almost certainly knows there is a priest ahead of him.

Unlike the priest, the Levite was not bound to many strict purity rules. He could have been more flexible than a priest in helping. Unlike the priest, who saw the man and passed by, the Levite gets closer. He comes to the place, looks, and then passes by. He may have even crossed the four-cubit defilement line to take a closer look out of curiosity before choosing not to help.

Defilement was probably not his main concern. He probably feared robbers, or more likely, was influenced by the priest's example. He could think, *"If the priest ahead didn't help, why should I, just a Levite, bother?"*

THE SAMARITAN

After the appearance of the priest and the Levite the audience expects a Jewish layman. Much to the shock and amazement of the audience, the third man along the road is one of the hated Samaritans.

Jesus could have chosen to narrate a story where a respected Jew helps a despised Samaritan. That kind of narrative would have been easier for His audience to accept emotionally. Instead, He does something far more provocative: **He makes the Samaritan—the one most hated by the Jews—the hero of the story.**

By presenting the Samaritan as morally better than the esteemed religious figures, Jesus powerfully confronts His listeners' prejudices.

Unlike the Priest and the Levite, the Samaritan was moved with compassion. The text has a clear progression as we move through the scenes. The priest only goes down the road. The Levite comes to the place. The Samaritan comes to the man.



The Samaritan engages in **seven specific acts of compassion** for the wounded man:

1. He **sees** the man.
2. He **feels** compassion.
3. He **goes** to him.
4. He **bandages** his wounds.
5. He **pours** oil and wine.
6. He **places** the man on his own animal.
7. He **takes** him to an inn and **cares** for him.

Later, he even **pays** the innkeeper and promises to return.

Samaritan's actions directly compensated for what the others failed to do—essentially redeeming the situation step by step where the Robber, Priest, and Levite failed in duty or caused harm:

Character	Action	Samaritan's Compensation
Robber	Stripped, beat, and left the man half-dead; took his money and possessions	Samaritan bandaged his wounds, covered his nakedness, and gave his own money to care for him
Priest	Should have shown compassion and provided transport (donkey as a symbol of priestly ride)	Samaritan put the man on his own donkey and personally carried the burden
Levite	Should have performed ritual care, such as pouring oil and wine (used in temple rites and healing)	Samaritan poured oil and wine on the wounds — offering healing.

Character	Action	Samaritan's Compensation
All Three (Robber, Priest, Levite)	Failed to see the man as a neighbour; either harmed him or ignored him	Samaritan saw , had compassion , acted generously , fulfilling the command to "love your neighbour as yourself"

The lawyer's question, "*Who is my neighbour?*" is not answered. Instead, Jesus reflects on the larger question, "*To whom must I become a neighbour?*" The answer being: **Anyone in need**. The neighbour is the Samaritan, not the wounded man. **At great cost, the Samaritan became a neighbour to the wounded man.**

On hearing the story, the lawyer has a chance to see that he cannot justify himself (that is, earn eternal life), because what he is challenged to do is beyond his capacity. The lawyer is pressed to understand: "*I must become a neighbour to anyone in need. To fulfil the law means that I must reach out in costly compassion to all people, even to my enemies. The standard remains even though I can never fully achieve it. I cannot justify myself and earn eternal life.*"

Unless we are willing to honour and learn from the very people we tend to look down on—"*our Samaritans*"—and extend mercy even to those we consider enemies, we have missed the true meaning of the **parable**. The story only makes sense when we allow it to challenge our prejudices and transform our view of others. If we cannot imagine our enemy as the one who shows us what true compassion looks like, *then the parable has not truly spoken to us.*

In this parable the Samaritan extends a costly demonstration of unexpected love to the wounded man, and in the process, Jesus again reveals the life-changing power of costly love that would climax at his cross. We cannot do justice to this parable without emphasizing that it seeks action, that people must put *"love of neighbour"* into action.

Key Lessons from this Parable

1. Self-Justification Fails

The parable shows that trying to justify ourselves before God will always fall short. The standard for eternal life is too high to be earned by our own efforts.

2. Love God and Love People 'as yourself'

The parable sets a goal to love God and others fully, like being

The Divine First Aid

The act of *"binding up wounds"* is language often used to describe God's healing intervention in the life of His people (Jeremiah 30:17).

This same healing motif is echoed powerfully in the opening verses of Hosea 6, where no fewer than twelve expressions resonate with the imagery found in the parable of the Good Samaritan:

- He has torn
- He will bind us up
- He will revive us
- He will raise us up
- That we may live before Him
- He will come to us
- Your love is like the dew
- I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice
- They transgressed the covenant
- Robbers lie in wait
- Priest commit villainy
- In the house of Israel, I have seen a horrible thing

Each of these phrases could serve as a prelude to Jesus' parable. The Samaritan arrives as a surprising saviour and performs four acts that directly mirror God's promised response in Hosea: **He binds up the wounds, revives the victim, raises him up and comes to him with mercy and provision.**

The parable reveals the **heart of God**, who comes to bind, heal, and restore through costly love. It is a portrait of **divine initiative**, a foreshadowing of Christ, and a call to embody that same mercy in a wounded world.

told to “be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).” It is difficult, but we should love one another with the help of the Holy Spirit.

3. Compassion from the Outsider

The Samaritan, considered an outsider and enemy, is the one who shows true love. This challenges deep-rooted social and racial prejudices.

4. Love is an action

For Jesus, love is not merely a *feeling*—it must be lived out in action. True compassion is both experienced inwardly and expressed outwardly. The proper order of love begins with wholehearted devotion to God—with all your heart, mind, and strength. From that relationship flows genuine love for others. Love is not simply about doing charitable acts; it is the natural expression of your identity as a child of God.

5. Be a Neighbour to all

In the Parable, the question shifts from “*Who is my neighbour?*” to “*To whom must I become a neighbour?*” The answer: anyone in need—even someone we don’t like.

6. God Uses Unexpected People

When religious leaders fail, God can choose anyone, like the

Samaritan, to show His love.

7. A Plan of Salvation

Salvation comes to the injured man through a costly, unexpected act of mercy. In this way, the *Samaritan mirrors Jesus*—the rejected one who steps in to heal, restore, and demonstrate the love of God at great cost to the whole world.

Practical Thoughts on How to Help Wisely

Being a child of God doesn't mean saying "yes" to everything. It means obeying God, loving well, and stewarding your resources—your time, energy, and safety—for His glory.

Loving like the Good Samaritan does not mean losing your peace, your safety, or your sense of responsibility. Christ's compassion was always purposeful. **Wise helping is not less spiritual — it's *more obedient*.**

1. Be guided by the Holy Spirit and not sympathy (Romans 8:14)

Not every need is a call. **Pray for discernment.** Sometimes helping may mean saying "**no**" or helping in a different way than expected. Let compassion be guided by wisdom, not impulse.

Let your "**yes**" be Spirit-led, and your "**no**" be equally Spirit-led — both are acts of love.

2. Prioritize Safety Without Withholding Love (Matthew 10:16)

Jesus told His disciples to be *"wise as serpents and innocent as doves."* This means we should not let fear paralyze us, neither should we act recklessly. If helping someone puts you or your family in danger, consider safer alternatives like involving trustworthy organizations, give support through referrals and background verifications or offer indirect help.

3. Recognize Boundaries are Biblical (Mark 1:35-38)

Even Jesus set boundaries. He didn't allow everyone access to Him at all times, and He didn't meet every demand (Luke 4:42-44). Boundaries are not selfish; they are **wise limits** that protect your calling, your health, and the dignity of others.

a) Time Boundaries

"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." – Luke 5:16

It's okay to say, *"I can help you for an hour today, but not the whole evening,"* or, *"Let me check my schedule first."*

b) Financial Boundaries

Proverbs 22:26–27 warns against becoming financially entangled in others' debts. Helping financially doesn't mean funding irresponsibility. You can offer food, job leads, or financial counseling instead of money as the first option.

c) Emotional Boundaries

You can listen and pray with someone, but you're not their saviour or therapist. It's okay to say: *"This is beyond what I can handle alone — let me connect you with someone trained to help."*

d) Safety Boundaries

In Acts 9:25, Paul was helped to escape a threat, not told to *"face the danger bravely."* If someone is violent, manipulative, or involved in criminal activity, you are not required to place yourself at risk. You can still love them — through prayer, indirect support, or helping from a safe distance — without enabling their behaviour.

e) Relational Boundaries

Jesus loved all, but He did not entrust Himself to everyone (John 2:24). If someone repeatedly takes advantage of your kindness, you may need to say, *"I care about you, but I need to step back until there's real change."*

Often, we mistake Christian love for constant reactivity to respond to the needs around us probably out of guilt. But Christ's way was different: purposeful, discerning, and rooted in communion with the Father. He didn't meet every demand of people—not from lack of compassion, but from clarity of purpose.

Again, knowing your limits isn't apathy or closing our eyes to suffering;

it's Spirit-led action. We're not called to fix everything, but to join God where He is already at work. **So let our compassion be present, not pressured; generous, not guilt-driven; faithful, not frantic.** Even the smallest act of love, done in Christ's name, carries eternal significance.



Conclusion

The Parable of the Good Samaritan begins with a weighty question: *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* It’s a question that echoes in every human heart—a longing not just for life after death, but for life that truly matters now. Jesus doesn’t dismiss the question, but redirects it. Instead of offering a checklist, He offers a story. A story that exposes our hearts, confronts our prejudices, and redefines righteousness—not as religious performance, but as costly love.

Eternal life is not earned through deeds, but it is evidenced by love. The kind of love that flows from a transformed heart—one that has encountered the mercy of God and cannot help but extend it. The parable does not just tell us what to do; it asks us what kind of person we are becoming. And in that becoming, we discover the life that truly is life.

So go—and do likewise.

Not to earn eternal life, but to live it.

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