

Di122 Essentials of Christianity

Lesson Di122-21 Christian Character: Loving God and Neighbor

Is there someone in your family or your culture that you look down upon? Somehow you think you are better than they are? It seems pretty common that people look down on others who are shorter, darker-skinned, have no hair, or speak with an accent. To love others is a choice we all can make. Love knows no national boundaries. Since God loves each of us so much, he wants us to demonstrate his love to others.

In our story today, love was shown by a man many did not trust. He was a hated, half-breed outsider. Let us imagine what it was like for the victim of a crime to be saved by a man he looked down on. We will call the victim Abel. Abel would not have even greeted such a foreigner before the man saved his life. Abel was a wealthy man who was traveling to Jericho on business. He was an upstanding Jew and had made this trip before.

The day came for Abel to travel on foot to Jericho. He packed a small bag, secured his money, and in the morning started on his 27-kilometer (17-mile) walk. The road was downhill, through rocky desert country. The day started well, with no indication that it would be anything but pleasant. But how suddenly things changed!

Abel had not gone far, when he noticed there were three men behind him at a distance. People had business everyday on this main route between Jerusalem and Jericho, so that was not unusual. But these men circled around and surprised Abel, waiting for him in a spot that was hidden. With no one in sight, they attacked him. They robbed him, stripped off his clothes, and beat him—taking all that he had. The robbers then ran away and left him by the side of the road to die. Abel could remember very little about the robbery; it all happened so fast. Now he was bleeding, drifting in and out of consciousness. He could not move, lying helpless in the hot sand.

Before long a great leader in the religious community came around the bend in the road and saw this battered and bloody body. Abel looked up at the priest through swollen eyes, thinking that surely this great man of God would stop and help him. What a surprise when the priest moved to the other side of the road and continued on his way. It seems he decided that showing love would make him unclean and cost too much. Abel feebly tried to shout, but nothing came out. He soon lost awareness of anything going on around him.

He came to, thinking, “This is a busy road; surely someone else will be along any minute.” And sure enough along came a man that Abel recognized to be a Levite—a lay worker in the synagogue. Would he choose to help? Abel certainly hoped so. “If he could just get me to a safe place to recover, I could repay his expenses,” Abel thought. Here was hope; was the love of God in this Jewish man? But again, this man pretended not to see him as he hurried by on the opposite side of the road. He apparently had his own reasons for not stopping to help. Perhaps he could not take time to love.

“What? How could this be? I need help now and this religious man chooses to ignore someone bleeding to death? What is wrong with him?”

Abel was losing all his strength; his life was draining away. What little life he had left would soon leave. But wait a minute. Who was that bending over? It was a Samaritan. Oh no, he surely would not help. He belonged to that hated country of Samaria. He knows that Jews hate the Samaritans and Samaritans hate the Jews. But this man took pity on Abel. He poured oil and wine on the bleeding wounds and bandaged them. Then he loaded Abel on his donkey, placing his own cloak around him.

Abel could hardly believe what was happening. God had answered his prayer for help. There was an inn just up the way. Could he be headed there? Or was he just going to throw Abel some place out of sight so he wouldn't be a disturbance to people along the road? What was this stranger up to?

Abel soon found out. At the inn all his questions were answered. The Samaritan rented a room and took care of the wounded man overnight. The next day he gave the innkeeper two silver coins, with instructions to take good care of Abel. This was equal to two day's wages, which would keep a person in an inn for a couple months. He actually told the innkeeper that he would be back on his return trip, to pay for any additional expenses. This hated Samaritan had chosen to show God's love to this stranger, as if he were his neighbor. He took pity upon him, making sure that all his needs were provided for.

After telling this story to an expert in the Jewish law, Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:30-37). Will you prove by your actions that you too are a good neighbor?

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us that loving someone is a choice that we make to take action and help someone. We ought to do all we can to bless them in the name of Jesus Christ. He told us: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31).

The **main truth** of the lesson is that God loves each person with an active limitless love. We as believers should develop this kind of love for him and for those around us. We are the neighbor of anyone who is in need.

Your **review** questions are:

1. Who did not show God's love to the wounded man? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "The priest and the Levite who chose to pass by on the other side of the road did not show God's love nor do anything to help him," you answered correctly.
2. How was God's love shown to Abel? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "God's love was shown to Abel by the Samaritan, when he stopped and cared for his immediate needs," you are correct.

3. From this story, summarize what God's love is like. [Pause]
A. If you answered, "Love is a choice we make to help all whom we have ability to help, showing God's love to them," you have answered correctly.
4. What has God done to demonstrate his love for us? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "God demonstrated his love for us by giving us his only son to die for us that our sins would be forgiven," you are right.

Your **assignment** is to listen to the story several times, realizing that you have the choice to love even those who hate you. Ask God to forgive you for looking down on anyone in your family or community. Stop and pray for someone who is not a friend that might have caused you torment. Witness to three others about the love of God extended to them.

Memorize

Mark 12:30-31 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."