

**Smothered in Kindness**  
**Psalm 82**  
**Luke 10:25-37**

This parable in Luke is perhaps one of the most well known parables of Jesus. When asked what the essence of Christianity is, many point out this parable as the answer. Often times, however, we find ourselves oversimplifying this parable to simply say that we should be nice to others like the Samaritan was. But the parable has a much deeper meaning that simply being nice to our neighbors. Rather, the parable is more accurately saying be nice not only to our friends and close neighbors, but also be nice to our enemies and those who have hurt us or who think differently than us.

The parable isn't simply about a stranger helping a man when two others simply walked on by. The parable is about the one we least expect to care and show more compassion than the ones we expect to care. Perhaps it will be better understood if we modernize the parable.

A young woman was walking one evening home from Thriftway with two bags of groceries. Her home was only six blocks south of the store. As the sun settled in for the night, two teenage boys seized the opportunity to abuse this young woman. They beat her, took advantage of her, stripped her of her belongings and left her in the residential alley about two blocks from her home. Now it happened that the next morning, a Christian pastor was out for his morning walk. At a distance, he notices the young woman left half dead in the alley. Thinking she was probably a druggie who caused her own misfortune, the pastor decides to take a walking detour in the opposite direction. Shortly after, a teacher at the Christian school, out taking her dog for a morning walk, sees the young woman in the alley. Not wanting to disturb her morning routine, she also changes her direction and walks away from the young woman.

Now, it also happened that a Muslim woman was out in her back yard hanging up some laundry. At a distance she notices the young woman lying there half dead. Having pity for the young woman, the Muslim woman rushes out to the young woman to see if she is okay. She then runs back to her house for bandages and a blanket. She also dials 911 and waits by this young woman's side until the ambulance arrives. She then jumps into her own car and follows the ambulance to Pioneer Memorial Hospital, where she patiently waits with the young woman to make sure she is okay. She then visits her for the two days she is in the hospital and gives her a ride home when she is discharged from the hospital. On the way home, she picks up some groceries for the young woman and makes sure she is settled nicely back into her home.

Now, which one of these three do you think was a neighbor to this young woman? Yes, the neighbor is the one who showed mercy! The point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is that the one we least expected was the one who demonstrated what it means to be a caring neighbor. Just because we are Christian does not automatically mean we are doing the will of God. Anyone can love family and friends, but it is much harder to love strangers and enemies. The Samaritan man did not personally know the half dead man. Nor did he relate to him because he was his own kind. Rather, seeing the condition of this man moved him to pity and wanting to show mercy and love, the Samaritan put actions to his thoughts by caring for the man until he was able to stand on his own two feet.

Part of the importance of this parable is not simply to show mercy to others. The point is to show mercy to whoever needs it regardless of the circumstances. By using a Samaritan as the merciful one, Jesus pushes the limits of his disciples faith. A Samaritan was an outsider, whom Jews were forbidden to speak with or associate with, much less have contact with! And yet in this story, the hero is the Samaritan. The should-have been faithful Jews thought too highly of themselves to care for this abused man. So in addition to showing mercy, Jesus is also saying that showing mercy involves humility and crossing boundaries.

In a recent prayer walk, I encountered resistance from a woman who wanted nothing to do with me or my simple questions. I tried to explain that I was only seeking information, but her resistance to me implied that she could escalate into anger if I pressed her further so I moved on to the next person. At first, I was frustrated with her lack of kindness, but as I continued the walk I began to realize that she was probably deeply hurting from some past experience and I had brought out those feelings. I knew then that rather than be angry with her for her hurtful remarks, I had to pray for her. So that is what I did.

Showing mercy is moving beyond uncomfortable boundaries to demonstrate God's love and care for others in their time of need. Jesus did not limit his kindness to only faithful and righteous Jews. Rather, Jesus moved beyond normal societal boundaries to show radical love, mercy and grace to those who needed it the most. What good is it to give food to those who already have enough? What difference does it make to provide shelter for persons who already have a home?

If we have a conscience, then we know that we are supposed to take care of ourselves. In the same way, God calls us to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as our self. Loving a neighbor as oneself is the same as saying we ought to care for others the same way we care for ourselves. But who are the others we should care for? The parable of the Good Samaritan tells us that we are neighbors to everyone who comes across our path. This may be the man who lives in the house next door, or the woman who lives at the end of the block. It may be the teenager we come across at the gas station, or the elderly person we pass in the grocery store. Our neighbors are simply anyone with whom we end up next to in our every day situations.

And just as God has shown mercy to us, we are to show mercy to others. In essence, we are to smother our neighbors in kindness. Even when we are faced with those who have hurt us, God wants us to use kindness and mercy in return. That means not getting even with those who have hurt us, but responding with prayer and mercy in return for evil. It means showing respect for those who give no respect in return. It means caring for those who will not return the favor. It means showing mercy to those who least deserve it. And it means doing good, even when everyone else is not. Amen.

### **Prayer:**

Good and great God,  
 Help us to be your servants who show mercy to those who least deserve it. Help us to show kindness to those who show no kindness in return. And help us to care for those in need, even when our enemies are the ones in need. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.