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Grounders:

Have you built a box around the love of God? Do you find yourself wanting to show love only to God's people who are in the box while withholding it from those who are not? Jesus addressed this discrimination—the restriction of God's limitless love in *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Lk. 10:25-37).

Who is my neighbor? (Lk. 10:25-29). An expert of the law wanted to test Jesus, so with impure motive, he asked Jesus, “*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Lk. 10:25). Eternal life was a reward reserved only for God's people. Jesus responded by asking the expert how he saw it, revealing whether the expert could be held accountable for his reply. He could. He had replied with the combination of two paramount verses in Scripture, known as the Great Commandment, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*” (Deut. 6:5); and “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Lev. 19:18). The response was affirmed by Jesus; however, the expert had a yearning inside himself to restrict the scope of who was his neighbor. “*Wishing to justify himself,*” he wanted to build a box around God's love and define *neighbor* only as “God's people” (Lk. 10:29).

The Revealer of Need (Lk. 10:30). Jesus retorted with a story that unfolded on a treacherous 17-mile strip of road where thieves hid in caves. Jesus said, “*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho*” (Lk. 10:30). Jerusalem was 2500' above sea level; Jericho was 770' below (the lowest point on earth). No one traveled the route alone, nor do they today. The man was robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for half-dead.

The Concealers of Greed (Lk. 10:31-32).

After leading worship in the temple, the Priest and Levite come on the scene. The priest had a moral conflict: the oral law prevented him from getting closer than 6' from the dead, so he could not get close enough to assess the situation. However, the written law provided that he could, but he would have to follow the interaction with a one week cleansing process where he must find, buy, and reduce a red heifer to ashes, a requirement of time, talent and treasures. The priest passed by. He had built a box around the Great Commandment (making it conditional to loving only God's people). However, he made the commandment not to defile unconditional. He was a concealer of greed, wanting to hoard God's love for himself and those like him.

The Levite had a moral conflict. On the road, people were extremely aware of the other travelers. It was highly likely that Jesus' audience had pictured that the Levite saw the priest pass by the beaten man. The Levite had more legal latitude than the priest. Would he be criticizing the priest's legal interpretation of the Law if he differed from the priest's behavior? The Levite passed by. Do you leave a church service with a box around God's love? Do you want to hoard God's love only for you and those who are like you? Are you a concealer of greed?

The Dealer of the Loving Deed (Lk. 10:33-35). Next, Jesus described a Samaritan who came on the scene of events. Samaritans were despised by Jews. This was a huge interruption to the listeners in the flow of the story. They probably had assumed that a natural progression of characters following this group would include



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another member of the Israel delegation. They must have been asking, “Why a Samaritan?”

In 722 BC, Assyrian captivity of the kingdom of Israel took place. Subsequently, Jews had intermarried with pagans, and Samaritans were the resulting half-breeds. In 128 BC, Jews attacked Samaritans who had built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. In 6 AD, Samaritans made the Jewish temple unclean at Passover by scattering human bones. Consequently, Jewish synagogues featured a daily prayer that Samaritans would not participate in *eternal life* (subscribing to the belief that God did not love Samaritans). *The Mishnah*, the 1st Century Jewish Commentary, trashed Samaritans referring to them as swine. Faithful Jews avoided passing through Samaria, but Jesus had not (Lk. 9:51-56).

The Samaritan was not a Gentile; he was also bound by the Law. In the listener’s minds, he was the least likely of the three to help. He had a conflict: was the beaten man in need not a Jew? If he was, the Samaritan believed that the priest and Levite would have stopped and helped. At the same time, if the beaten man were Jewish, the Samaritan risked retaliation from the beaten man’s family. They would have assumed that the Samaritan had something to do with the beating and the theft. Why else would he have broken Jewish Law?

Who are your Samaritans? Who do you exclude from God’s love? Is it gays or straights? Is it liberals or conservatives? Is it Muslims or Jews? Is it rich or poor? Is it athletes or nerds? Is it religious or irreligious? Do you find yourself avoiding and despising them? This is discrimination which comes in 2 forms: *jealousy* (from the bottom up) or *prejudice* (from the top down).

Jesus said that the Samaritan felt compassion, *splanchnizomai* in Greek. Jesus had felt compassion for all (Matt. 9:36). The Samaritan’s compassion for the beaten man led him to action. He went to him. He bandaged the man’s wounds. He poured oil (for soothing the wounds) and wine (for disinfecting the wounds) which was forbidden by law for a Samaritan. He placed him on his donkey which was counter-cultural. He took him to the inn in Jericho and took care of him. He paid 2 denarii (2 days’ wages) for a 24-night stay. He agreed to pay more if needed. All of this in spite of the fact that he would not be reimbursed—a Jew could be reimbursed by another Jew, but not hope for reimbursement toward a Samaritan had existed.

Who has loved you like that? In Jesus’ story, the guy who loved radically is the guy who did not build a box around God’s love, limiting to only those on the inside.

Conclusion: Jesus’ Answer to the Question and His Accompanying Command (Lk. 10:36-37). “*Who is my neighbor?*” In essence, Jesus had answered, “*Everyone*” (Lk. 10:36). Jesus reframed the question, “*Who is my neighbor*” in a way that the expert in the law had to wrestle with an enemy actually being his neighbor. Jesus said, “*Love your enemies*” (Matt. 5:44). When Jesus had asked him which of the three players in the story had been a neighbor to the beaten man in need, the expert in the Law would not utter, “Samaritan.” Instead he said, “*The one who had mercy on him*” (Lk. 10:36). Jesus clearly communicated that the 2 parts of the Great Commandment are



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inseparable (1 Jn. 4:19-21). We cannot love God without loving others, and there is no restrictive box around God's people. We are called to love all.

“Go and do likewise” (Lk. 10:37). Jesus is commanding each of us to love like the Samaritan, without a box containing who is in and restricting who is out. This week, think of someone who loved you radically and go love like that! It won't be you serving others; rather, it will be Christ in you.

Going and doing likewise,

Mitch