The Good Samaritan February 11, 2024

**Bible Verses:** Luke 10:25-37

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 360 to 365

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **Reflecting on what true love looks like.**

We often think of love as being easy, but this parable asks us to stretch our concept of it further - true love means even loving those that don’t love us back! Assuming the injured man in the story was Jewish, we as listeners are meant to expect that this Samaritan man would want nothing to do with him (for more on the history of the Jewish-Samaritan divide, see the *Biblical Background*). But without asking for anything in return, the Samaritan man shows true, unconditional love – and it is that type of self-giving love that we aspire to every time we read or hear this passage. The Samaritan cares for the man not only in the moment – he goes the extra mile by bandaging his wounds, bringing him to an inn, and paying for his care/needs.

* **We can see ourselves in the Levite and priest who walk by.**

We’d all love to identify ourselves with the Good Samaritan in this passage, but I’d imagine that all of us – kids and adults – can think of times when we might have “passed by” someone in need, whether figuratively or literally. There are sometimes valid reasons for doing so – but it should be noted that there were likely valid reasons for why the priest and the Levite walked by too! Jewish law prohibited physical contact with corpses (you don’t need to get into this point with the kids!) so they may have been assuming that the man had passed away. They may have also been worried about physical danger to themselves. But regardless of their reasons, the Samaritan man certainly would have had his reasons for walking by as well – but he chose to stop. It’s a challenge to all of us to stop and notice those in need.

* **“Who is my neighbor?”**

Though Jesus’ reference to the Samaritans spoke to his context, it’s worth thinking about people or groups who would be the “Samaritans” of our day? There are obviously numerous ways that we can answer that question. The most frequent parallel drawn today is about how Muslims were viewed with suspicion in many places after 9/11, but given our church’s clear commitment to embracing other faiths, I think it’s important to push ourselves further. Is there a group with whom we are personally uncomfortable that we can apply to this parable? Is it fundamentalist Christianity? Is it aggressive atheism? Some other group? It doesn’t matter who we pick – everyone is our neighbor. Everyone. No exceptions. This parable was meant to challenge us… find a way for it to challenge you!

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
	+ Younger kids: Do you have a team you want to win Super Bowl?
	+ Older kids: Highs and Lows from the past week
* **When was the last time someone did something really nice for you and you weren’t expecting it? What made it such a surprise?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Today, we are learning about perhaps Jesus’ most famous parable – the parable of the Good Samaritan, and its message of unconditional love.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Why do you think the first two men passed by the injured man? What are reasons we sometimes avoid helping others out?
* Do you think it was hard for the Samaritan to give up his time and money to help this man? How can showing love mean making tough choices?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* One of the reasons that Jesus tells this story is that the Jewish audience he was telling the parable to didn’t like Samaritans – but Jesus was trying to teach us that we should all care for one another no matter what. What do you think the world would be like if we saw everyone as our neighbor?
* Is it hard to show love to everyone? How can the parable of the Good Samaritan be an example of what Jesus wants us to do?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* Today is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany, where we’ve learned a lot about who Jesus is and what his teachings mean for our lives. What do we learn about who Jesus is in this parable? How might we practice what Jesus teaches during the upcoming season of Lent?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions / Activity**

* **Take some time to welcome / get to know the kids!**
	+ When was the last time someone did something really nice for you? How did you feel afterwards?
	+ Our Bible passage today is all about helping others – what are jobs that you have in your family, or ways that you help others?

**Warm Up Game – One Thing I Love**

* Our Bible Passage about the Good Samaritan is all about helping others and showing them love – so I wanted to play a game where we show love to ourselves, our families, and each other!
* (Explain that this will just be a simple game where everyone gets to take a turn answering a few questions):
	+ What is one thing that you love about your family?
	+ What is one thing that you love about Sunday School?
	+ What is one thing that you love about yourself or someone here?
* Talk as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Our Bible story today is one of Jesus’ most famous parables – a short story that helps teach us an important lesson.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!
* We all know that love is really important, but sometimes we forget to share it with ourselves and with others. How did the Samaritan man show the injured man that he loved him?
* What are ways that we can show love to other people in our life? Our parents? Our brothers/sisters/friends? People who we don’t know?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Walter Rauschenbusch (Rao - shen - bush)**

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one of Jesus’ most beloved parables, in no small part because it serves as an example of how we put our faith in action – something the theologian Walter Rauschenbusch was absolutely vital!

Born in New York in 1861, Rauschenbusch grew up in a highly religious family of Lutherans and Baptists – including his pastor father. Although he became skeptical of religion and Christianity in his youth, he had a profound religious experience at the age of 17 which stuck with him the rest of his life.

Rauschenbusch studied in both Germany and the United States, eventually deciding to enroll in Rochester Theological Seminary in New York. His experience in the seminary challenged many of the ideas around the Bible that he grew up with – such as the Bible being inerrant – but he soon discovered that he felt less called to academia and more drawn to church ministry.

As a pastor, though, Rauschenbusch became overwhelmed by the depth of need and hurt in his congregation – and also became dismayed by how many of his fellow clergy were more preoccupied with saving people’s souls while doing nothing to alleviate the challenges they were experiencing in their daily lives. Citing numerous scripture passages from the Gospels, Rauschenbusch argued that the “Kingdom of God is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven.”

Rauschenbusch would go on to become a leading voice in the “Social Gospel” movement – even writing *A Theology for the Social Gospel* in 1917 that helped clarify the movement around resisting inequality, poverty, crime, racism, and other social ills. Although the movement did not take hold, it was later picked up by Martin Luther King Jr., who said of Rauschenbusch: “His writings left an indelible imprint on my thinking” and described himself as “a firm believer in the social gospel”, influencing his thinking about the Civil Rights Movement!

Crafts / Activities

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**Good Samaritan Heart Puzzle**

**(Ages 5+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Crayons/Markers
* Scissors

Instructions:

* This puzzle can be used by most ages – just color, cut out, and then assemble the pieces into a heart that retells the Good Samarian story!

**Good Samaritan Maze**

**(Ages 5+, 3-5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This maze is certainly challenging, but hopefully kids ages 5 and up will have fun with it. It’s not clear, but you start from the upper right.

**Good Samaritan Number Puzzle**

**(Ages 7+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This handout looks really overwhelming at first, but the underlying mechanics are simple enough: just draw a line connecting all of the numbers listed! It eventually will spell out a hidden message.

Biblical Background – Good Samaritan[[1]](#footnote-2)

Most of us probably remember learning in Sunday School that Jews and Samaritans hated one another, but it was never totally clear why... so, here’s the Cliffs Notes version of the deep-seeded roots of the Jewish-Samaritan dispute:

The initial division goes back almost 1000 years – you may remember that after Solomon’s death, Israel split into two distinct kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. These two kingdoms co-existed for roughly 250 years, but the Northern Kingdom was invaded by the Neo-Assyrian empire in 722 BCE and much of the population was taken into exile.

Ultimately, those who remained in the Northern Kingdom after the exile would become known as the “Samaritans” – possibly because of a connection with the northern city of Samaria, though that is unclear. Regardless, over the next few centuries this northern remnant would reject the additional prophets and writings that were added into the Hebrew Bible (most of which were written post 722 BCE), instead accepting only the Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) as the authoritative word of God. Samaritans saw themselves as maintaining true ancient Israelite practices, calling themselves “the guardians of the Torah”.

Though they continued to peacefully co-exist for a few centuries, the books of Ezra-Nehemiah suggest a fraying relationship towards the end of the 5th century BCE. The true breaking point, however, was the Samaritan partnership with the hated Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes in the mid-2nd century. After an uprising in 164 BCE led to an independent Jewish kingdom (the Hasmonean dynasty), subsequent Jewish rulers began to double-down on the separation from the Samaritans – culminating in the Jewish leader John Hyrcanus destroying the Samaritan temple in Samaria in 113 BCE. To complicate matters, when Rome conquered the region they lumped the traditionally separate Jewish and Samaritan lands together when they formed the province of “Judea”, meaning these historic rivals were forced into closer contact with one another… and tensions between the two continued to be high into Jesus’ day and beyond!

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)