

# The stories Jesus told

## THE GOOD SAMARITAN

### ENCOUNTER

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Read 2 Kings 17:3-6, 24, 29-41. Their Assyrian conquerors mixed the Hebrew people of the northern kingdom with people from other countries. These combined people (Samaritans) mixed their religions as well, while the Hebrews of the southern kingdom served their Hebrew God. This created distrust and hatred between the Hebrews and the Samaritans. This separation still exists in Palestine. Do you think this separation is what God wants? Why would the Jews of today and the Palestinians both believe that they are right in their hatred? What might they be missing in their opinions?

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- Read Luke 9:51-56, John 4:7-9, 8:42-48. All of us have been in situations in which we could either fan the angry flames or offer a peaceful approach. Which approach is most typically human? If we allow God to influence us, which way will we tend to react? Jesus' enemies called him a vile name of the time—"Samaritan." What kinds of more "subtle" but stinging names might we

call people today? What is their likely reaction? What happens to the dispute when we use such labels?

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- Read John 4:19-30. The woman asked where they should worship, but Jesus said the important things were who they worshipped and how they worshipped. In saying this, how was Jesus offering God to people everywhere? How did this offer the possibility of breaking down barriers and moving toward peace? If we wish to emulate Christ, how can we do much the same kind of thing today? In what ways does your church do that today?

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- Read Luke 10:25-29. What a challenge! Who are these neighbours we must “love”? Are they the ones we already like? Are they the people we usually “hang out” with? Who else? What does “love” really mean? What about strangers? What about “enemies,” in business, politics, across national boundaries, etc.? What about people who are not nice to us? How should we act toward them? Do you think Jesus was just being “high-minded” and offering us an unobtainable goal to shoot toward? Can our love of God help us in loving others?

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- Read Luke 10:29-37. In this case, Jesus showed the ‘neighbour’ to be a total stranger who happened to be in need and, of all people, a Samaritan, who was also a “neighbour” who stopped to help. Jesus wanted to demonstrate God’s grace... in us! If God can love and embrace us, despite all our disobedience, can we do likewise? If we can, is that a way of thanking God? Is it a way of serving God? Is it a way of showing our obedience to God? Can we do this? Have you ever helped an “enemy”? What was your experience in doing this? Did it change the way you saw that person?

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- Read Acts 1:7-8, 8:4-17. If Phillip, a Jew, had not gone and preached the gospel in Samaria, “the enemy’s camp,” would we be Christians today? Could you do what Phillip did? Did it take courage? Trust in Jesus? What does it take for us to let go of our prejudices? If we can, in what ways might our lives be changed? Might other lives be changed as well? Do we have to make a giant leap, or can we approach this challenge one step at a time? Where or how should we begin?

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## FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

### MODERN SAMARITANS

Religiously the Samaritans are adherents of Samaritanism, an Abrahamic religion closely related to Judaism. Based on the Samaritan Torah, Samaritans claim their worship is the true religion of the ancient Israelites prior to the Babylonian Exile, preserved by those who remained in the Land of Israel, as opposed to Judaism, which they assert is a related but altered and amended religion brought back by those returning from exile.

Today a few Samaritans survive, not having lost their identity through intermarriage. There are about 550-600 active practitioners of the Samaritan religion with some admixture of Islam, most of whom live in the city of Nablus, in the area now known as the West Bank. Although their temple is long since destroyed, they still celebrate Passover every year around their ancient

temple site of sacrifice, Mount Gerizim, their holy mountain. The Day of Atonement is the holiest day of their year and the Sabbath is most rigidly observed. They are a distinctly religious community and their high priest acts as their political official and representative.

About half of the Samaritans live in Kiryat Luza, close to the mountain of Gerizim, just south of Nablus in Palestine, which is their religious centre. The rest live in Holon district right outside Tel Aviv in Israel.

The Samaritans of Palestine participate in the life of Palestine, while the Samaritans of Israel participate in the Israeli society. In spite of the continuing conflict in the area, the group has managed to keep privileged relationships with both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

## EMBRACE

Who are our “enemies”? Are they more often specific individuals, or do they tend to be countries, religions, cultures, customs, political positions, etc.? Would you say that you have many or few individual people who you might see as enemies? Would you say that many or few people see you as an enemy? Is there any correlation between these last two questions?

## ENGAGE

This week make a list of your prejudices and your “enemies”. Pray for them every day, asking that love might replace the darkness in your heart. Next week, share with the group whatever you experienced in making this special effort.

## SUGGESTED PRAYER

*Loving God, when we look around our world, we realize we have a long way to go in loving you and loving our neighbours as you call us to. We hear your word, and we desire to move closer to the ideal you have showed us by loving us despite our many flaws. As we pray this prayer, we open the door of our hearts to invite you in. Instil in us the spirit, the love and the compassion of Jesus so that we may become ever-more-true disciples. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## DAILY READINGS

### MONDAY - 2 KINGS 17:3-6, 24, 29-41

The Assyrian Empire overran the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. They followed their usual policy of breaking up and mixing people groups to reduce the chance of rebellions. The new settlers brought with them the usual Middle Eastern belief that each god had its own distinct territory. They couldn't see why worshipping Israel's god should affect their worship of their other "hometown" gods. Instead of reaching out to these neighbours, the Hebrews of the southern kingdom seem to have responded with condemnation and hostility.

- The writer(s) of 2 Kings apparently lived in Babylon during Judah's exile, about 150 years after Assyria captured Israel (see 2 Kings 24:27-30). The disdain the book showed for the early Samaritans grew even worse after the return from exile (see Ezra 4:1-5, Nehemiah 4:1-9). Might the story have been different if people in the southern kingdom had welcomed their new neighbours, and sought to share God's love with them? Were those who sowed distrust and hatred doing what God wanted, or not?

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- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote: "The hatred between Jews and Samaritans had gone on for hundreds of years—and is reflected, tragically, in the smouldering tension between Israel and Palestine today. Both sides claimed to be the true inheritors of the promises to Abraham and Moses, so both sides saw themselves as rightful owners of the land. Few Israelis today travel from Galilee to Jerusalem by the direct route, because it will take them through the West Bank and risk violence." Since Jesus worked so hard to break down hatred between peoples, what

had the Israelites not understood about their God at the time the Samaritans came into being?

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*Prayer: Lord, even as your people, we fall into the human tendency to devalue anyone who is different from us. Help me more and more to live out your love for the whole world. Amen*

### TUESDAY - LUKE 9:51-56, JOHN 4:7-9, 8:42-48

Take the mutual dislike between Jews and Samaritans we read about yesterday, mix well, and let harden for 700 years—and you have the situation Jesus found. Just knowing Jesus was going to Jerusalem led a Samaritan village to refuse to welcome him. And when Jesus' enemies wanted to call him as vile a name as they could think of, they came up with "Samaritan," which for them was practically a synonym for "having a demon."

- In Luke 9:55, James and John reacted to the Samaritans' slight as we are often tempted to. "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?" they asked. But Jesus said no. Have you ever been in a position either to build the flames of hatred higher, or to lower the temperature and move toward peace? Which course did you choose? How did things work out?

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- You've probably never called anyone a "Samaritan," unless you were praising them for being helpful. In your circles, what are some of the insulting names you could call

someone else? What creates the kind of inner blindness in us that the Jewish leaders showed when they called Jesus a “Samaritan”? What can help you to see people through God’s eyes when you find insulting language for them coming to mind?

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*Prayer: Lord Jesus, when Samaritans snubbed you, you refused the path of anger. When I’m hurt, my natural inclination is like the disciples’. It’s true that “hurt people, hurt people.” Transform my heart. Amen*

**WEDNESDAY - JOHN 4:19-30**

The woman believed Jesus was a prophet, so she asked where people should worship—the mountain in Samaria or Jerusalem. This theological issue kept separation and prejudice alive between Samaritans and Jews. Jesus didn’t focus on the place of worship, but on who we worship (“the Father”) and in what spirit (“worship in spirit and truth”). The woman said she knew a Messiah would come. Jesus said, “I Am—the one who speaks with you.” His disciples were shocked to find him talking with a woman, especially a Samaritan. The woman went to tell people what had happened and invite them to “come and see” Jesus.

**THURSDAY - LUKE 10:25-29**

Note how Luke described this exchange: “A legal expert stood up to test Jesus.” He meant that this man was not there to learn from Jesus, but was trying to smoke out Jesus’ “flawed” views. When Jesus agreed that Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 summed up God’s desire for humans, the legal expert pushed harder. The Message renders verse 29 as “looking for a loophole.” The gist of his question seems to have been, “Where would you draw the line at loving others?”

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- The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament notes that Jewish teachers usually applied “neighbour” in Leviticus 19:18 to fellow Israelites. That ignored Leviticus 19:33-34, which extended God’s command beyond all national or ethnic lines. Where do you tend to put the limits of God’s command to love our neighbours? Do you think it’s impractical and unrealistic to consider everyone on earth your neighbour?

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- Israel’s teachers had long connected “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind” (Deuteronomy 6:5) with “love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus affirmed that connection. Is it possible to live into either half of that combination without the other? How do you find God’s love for you, and your love for God, spilling into all your other relationships?

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*Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I want to test you, to argue with you, remind me of this legal expert. Remind me that you came to change my heart, not just to give me more interesting opinions. Amen*

**FRIDAY - LUKE 10:29-37**

Jesus answered the “who is my neighbour?” question with a story. Two religious leaders, he said, passed by a beaten up man left by the road side. Touching a body would defile them ceremonially, and since they couldn’t tell if he was alive or dead, they probably thought it wise to avoid contact. Along came a Samaritan (one of “those people”!), and he went “above and beyond” to help the badly hurt Jewish man. Jesus simply asked. “Which one of these three was a neighbour to the man who encountered thieves?”

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Jesus asked, ‘Can you recognize the hated Samaritan as your neighbour?’ If you can’t, you might be left for dead. Jesus’... challenge to Israel is to see that the way of confrontation with Samaritans, Romans and pagans of whatever sort is not the way of living and showing God’s grace. He is urgently offering the way of peace, and only the ‘children of peace’ (10:6) will escape the self-inflicted judgment that will befall those bent on violence.” In light of Jesus’ story, who are your previously unrecognized neighbours? List all the “Samaritans” you can think of in your world, and pray about how to become open to seeing them as “neighbours.”

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- Have you ever been helped by someone you didn’t expect to help you, someone you thought of as an “outsider” or an enemy? How did that experience affect your attitude toward that person (and others who are different from you) moving forward?

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*Prayer: Loving Lord, help me love the people I find unlovable. Change my heart to more and more see all people (including myself) as you see us—as your children, worthy of love. Amen*

**SATURDAY - ACTS 1:7-8, 8:4-17**

Probably a few eyebrows went up among the disciples when Jesus said they would be his witnesses “in Samaria.” But a few years later, first Phillip and then Peter and John found a warm reception for the good news of Jesus in Samaria. It was a crucial first step in carrying out the world-wide mission that has now reached you, and included you in God’s worldwide family of love, grace and service.

- The lawyer who asks Jesus the question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ is trying to find a new rule, a new law. In the Good Samaritan story, Jesus indicates that the law of love puts an end to legalism. No more laws, no more rules. We are simply to love one another as He has loved us. How can letting Jesus’ love you renew and deepen your heart? How can “letting go” of your prejudices allow God to give you the freedom to love God, yourself and your neighbour?

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*Prayer: O God, as you change me from the inside out, set me free to see as you see, to love as you love and to treat others as I would have them treat me. Amen.*