

Home Church Study Guide—April 11, 2010
Living Out the Cross: Being a True Neighbor (Luke 10:25-42)

The Pharisees were consumed by wanting to justify themselves. They had developed elaborate systems of protecting the laws they deemed most important, and missed the most obvious one—submitting oneself fully to God. What Jesus does in this passage is absolutely fascinating because He refuses to allow the man to find the self-justification for which he was looking. Instead, Jesus offers him what he really needed—life! It is important to understand the nature of the legal expert's question. He was not asking about life after death. "Eternal life" was the Jewish designation of life in the messianic kingdom—life in the end-time kingdom of God. Jesus had been announcing the coming of the kingdom, so the lawyer was asking, "what do I have to do to participate in that kind of life?" Jesus chose to answer that question with a question. This is a fascinating technique that Jesus used often. While the people wanted quick and easy answers, Jesus wanted to give them what they most needed. By allowing the expert of the law to respond, Jesus affirmed that which He himself believed. Jesus was not working against the Law, He was fulfilling it. And so the lawyer responded, "Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." He knew the answer. Jesus said, "You are right on target—do this, and live." Notice that Jesus' response indicates a present tense life. He was answering the lawyer's question about life in the kingdom—now!

Again, we see ourselves in this lawyer. We know the answers. Our problem is not that we do not know enough about God, it is that we do not do. Jesus ends his good Samaritan story with these words, and we must take them seriously—"Go and do likewise." Knowing the answer is not the same as living the life. Faith is an active expression of living consistently with that which we believe to be true. Authentic discipleship—the focus of this study is simply living faithfully to that which we affirm to be truth. So the lawyer is seeking life and wants to test Jesus to see if he knows where it is to be found. Of course, when the lawyer himself indicates that he knows the answer, he must now justify himself and so he asks a "limiting" question. "If I have to love my neighbor, who, then is that?" I believe he fully expected Jesus to draw a fairly small circle. "Your neighbor is the one who believes what you believe." No, Jesus would not answer the question. The question itself was wrong, and so He tells a story. It is a masterful telling of the story to make an incredible profound point. The crucial point was when Jesus spoke of the Samaritans walking by. You can be sure everyone expected the Samaritan would take anything the man might have left and then kill him for pleasure. In our times, the functional equivalent of a Samaritan would be a "follower of Ben Laden". It would be someone from whom we would never expect anything but pain and death, much less a generous heart. The crowd could not help but see His point. If one wanted to enjoy life in the messianic kingdom, the question could not be "who is my neighbor", rather it would be "to whom shall I be a neighbor." Kingdom life involves generous mercy. That is, by the way, the road on which we enter such a life. By God's extravagant mercy, he heals our wounds and gives us rest. If we want to find true life in the kingdom, we must love God completely and dispense His endless love wherever it is needed. Jesus meant it when He said, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus just finished telling of His magnificent view of life in the kingdom—one of generous and abundant serving. Now we find Martha wanting to serve and wanting Mary to help her serve, and Jesus says that's not what's important! I do think it is important to realize "serving" can be as "self-serving" as anything else. When we serve with the thought of what we are doing, the good work of serving can become a distraction to the more important things in life—such as living in the kingdom. Authentic discipleship cannot be reduced to a list of certain activities or rules. It is rather a mind for God that is flexible—allowing for that which is important in the moment to win over the lesser good. Rightful behavior in the kingdom calls for appropriate decisions based on the need for the moment. At that time, women were not considered worthy of learning, but clearly Mary was invited to be at the feet of the great teacher. In anyone else's thinking, Martha had a legitimate point, but the Lord gently corrects Martha. He reveals that her way of self-focused service leads to a life of frantic distraction. Physical food was not the greatest need of the moment, and Jesus had better food to offer. That was the "one thing" that was needed. Seek first the kingdom. We are in need of only one thing. Everything else causes distraction and worry. Eat at the feast table of God's abundant mercy and love. Mary chose the better part. Have we?

"So What" for Home Church discussion:

1. Of what do you think the "truly good life" is comprised? Do you believe in Jesus when he says we will never find our life if we don't first lose it for his purposes?
2. What keeps us from living the "truly good life" as defined by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan (one who shows mercy)?
3. Share stories of times when you have seen this truth at work (good life through helping others). Focus on a particular activity in which your small group could participate that would help the hurting.