

Chapter 12

Relationship with Society: Combating Racism



PAINTING: Vincent Van Gogh (Dutch, 1853-1890), *The Good Samaritan* [public domain]

Opening Question: As you look at this image and reflect on the biblical story of The Good Samaritan, how do the people in this image display a response to racism?

DEBRIEF

Have group members repeat the memory verse and share how they did with last week's "Respond" step as they arrive. Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study.

Our previous studies have focused on relationships with others in personal contexts. Now we move to relationships on a larger scale: relationships with society.

HEAR THE WORD

Jesus, born a Jewish man, was well aware of the cultural brokenness of his time. His ministry crossed all cultural boundaries and expectations: he fellowshipped with women, the poor, Gentiles (non-Jews), tax collectors, and the wealthy. Most of his interactions had some cultural-religious-political impact.

Today's Scripture will focus on one interaction Jesus had with a Jewish religious teacher that brought the teacher's racism to the surface and challenged his understanding of what is needed to enter into the eternal life of God's Kingdom.

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

- Expert in the law: someone who studies the Jewish law (the Pentateuch or first 5 books of the Bible)
- History between Israelites (Jews) and Samaritans
 - Ethnic - Gentiles were exiled to the northern kingdom of Israel by Assyria in 722 BC. Samaritans descended from Jews who intermarried with Gentiles at that time.
 - Religious - often viewed as syncretistic or idolatrous - religious tension that historically led to violence.
 - There was deep hatred and ethnic tension between Jews and Samaritans. For Jews, to be called 'Samaritan' was a derogatory/insulting term.
- Parable: A story that has a deeper spiritual meaning
 - In Rabbinic tradition, in this parable, one would expect a "pious Israelite" to perform a pious duty that a priest and Levite had failed to perform" (Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary NT 2nd edition, 208).
 - Therefore, the expectation for Jewish listeners at the time is that a pious Israelite would be the hero of the story: instead Jesus makes a hated Samaritan the hero!

- The road from Jerusalem to Jericho
 - A 27 km-long arduous journey (900 vertical meters): from higher to lower
 - Jerusalem = location of the temple, Jericho = where many priests lived
 - Robbers were common on this road and targeted people traveling alone. (Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary NT 2nd edition, 207)
- Priest: A Levite who has descended from Aaron and serves and teaches in the temple
 - Leviticus 21:1-3 - priests should not touch a corpse or would become ritually unclean.
- Levite: An Israelite from the priestly tribe of Levi: would also become unclean
- Two denarii: two full days' wages

Luke 10:25-37: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (NIV)

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out

two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Have one person read verses 25-29 and another verses 30-37.
2. Now read the passage silently. What stands out to you? What questions do you have?
3. Who are the characters? What is the purpose of the expert's questioning of Jesus, according to verse 25?
4. List the actions that each person takes in response to the man on the road. What similarities or differences do you see?

INTERPRET (What does the passage mean?)

5. Imagine that you are the priest or Levite. How do you feel when you see the body? Why do you think the priest and Levite did not stop to check on the man who was attacked?
6. Imagine that you are the Samaritan. How do you feel when you see the man on the road? What does it cost the Samaritan to care for the man? What does the Samaritan risk?
7. The expert in the Law asks questions that reveal a shortcoming in his understanding of what it means to follow God. The expert may view "loving your neighbor" as a task to check off, motivated by gain and not compassion that reflects the heart of God. In telling the parable, what is Jesus teaching about what it means to be a follower of God?

8. Considering the cultural brokenness between Jews and Samaritans at the time, what is significant about Jesus highlighting the Samaritan as the hero of the parable?

APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

9. There were strong racial and religious barriers between Jews and Samaritans. Where do you see racism in your host country? In your home country? Have you been the target of hidden or clear racism? How can you and your group respond to what you see and experience around you?

Memory Verse: Leviticus 19:18 (NIV)

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Jewish people would understand this as referring only to fellow Jews, but Lev. 19:33-34 extends the command:

“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. ³⁴ The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

Write the verse in English and your heart language on an index card.

RESPOND

Practice: Spend time in personal reflection and write some thoughts in your journal to answer these questions:

- Put yourself in the mind of the expert in the law. He answers Jesus' last question correctly but can't acknowledge that the true neighbor was a Samaritan. Why would have this been so hard for him? Ask the Spirit to bring to the surface any hidden prejudices inside *you* and show you how you need to grow.
- Who are individuals or people groups with whom you spend most of your time? With whom are you most comfortable? Are there individuals or people groups you tend to avoid? What people groups did you and/or your family grow up fearing or distrusting?
- After the next study on inter-ethnic reconciliation, you will be challenged to reach out to a group you have been avoiding. Start praying about this now.

CLOSING

Close in group prayer for the practice step, other group needs and the needs of the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caroline Lancaster is a second-generation South Asian American and third-culture kid. She has lived in various parts of California, Singapore, Boston, and most recently, outside of Chicago. As a student at the University of California San Diego, Caroline fell in love with Jesus and learned about God's heart for justice. After working in marketing and design for a few years, she became a campus minister with InterVarsity at Boston University. She currently serves as a National Multiethnic Resource Specialist and is passionate about equipping staff and students to pursue reconciliation and justice on campus. She is a certified Cultural Intelligence Trainer and participated in Rev. Dr. Brenda-Salter McNeil's Reconciliation Leaders Cohort. She is married to a wonderful, white-Armenian husband and is mother of a son.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

- Help students internalize Jesus' value of loving people of every ethnicity and diverse group
- To enable students to begin or continue surfacing their own hidden prejudices, as the Holy Spirit directs them
- To help students consider racism as a societal issue and look for ways they see it on and off campus
- To enable them to consider how they can continue this work in their next context

Notes on the Questions

Question 3: The expert wants to "test" Jesus, perhaps to show the crowd the superiority of those who have studied the law for years.

Question 5: Touching a dead body would have made them unclean. They probably didn't want to risk this. They may have felt some guilt at not checking to see if the man were alive, but also fear of being defiled.

Question 6: The text tells us the Samaritan took pity, but he may have felt fear for different reasons from the first two. What does it cost the Samaritan to care for the man? What does the Samaritan risk?

- Time, money, resources, cleanliness, change of plans, his own safety
- Additionally: PERCEPTION - the Samaritan is on a road where robbers are common. What might the assumption and perception be, seeing a Samaritan crouched over an injured body? The Samaritan risked being perceived as the perpetrator, rather than the hero (which could have put his own life in danger).

Question 7: What is Jesus teaching about what it means to be a follower of God?

- Following Jesus is just not about gaining eternal life, but reflecting the heart of God in word and deed. Loving radically, compassionately, and generously and pursuing healing and reconciliation across enemy lines help bring the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Question 8: Considering the cultural brokenness between Jews and Samaritans at the time, what is significant about Jesus highlighting the Samaritan as the hero of the parable?

- From cultural context notes: Jesus reframes an “insulting” name as something to aspire to.
- Jesus does not ignore the ethnic tension between Jews and Samaritans. The story not only instills value and worth into people that have been deemed the “enemy,” but Jesus addresses the expert’s biases. Unlike the assumptions of the religious elite, people of all nations are welcome in the Kingdom of God and will be worshiping him in heaven (Rev. 7:9).

Question 9: If students have been the target of racism, helping them deal with issues of forgiveness as outlined in the last two chapters is crucial. If they feel unsafe, discuss how they can protect themselves. Could other group members help? Does the university have escort services?

Group members could also educate themselves about anything their university is doing to fight racism on campus.