

Who is my Neighbor?

Ryan J. Hulbert, Ph.D.

The question, "Who is my neighbor?", was asked of Jesus by a lawyer in the New Testament of the Bible. Rather than answering the question directly, Jesus told the lawyer a story which has come to be known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Following the verbatim recounting of the parable, a phrase by phrase analysis of the parable will review the inferred personal characteristics of the Good Samaritan. Finally, a structured system of transitioning from a neighborly relationship to a family relationship will be discussed, with the goal of helping to stimulate interest in becoming part of a Beloved Community.

The Parable

The following are the 7 verses from St. Luke Chapter 10, verses 30-37 from the King James version of the Bible:

"30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said to him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he [the lawyer] said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

The Neighborly Person

Beginning with verse 33 through verse 35, a phrase by phrase analysis is performed, with inferred personal characteristics of the Good Samaritan following each phrase.

<u>Phrase</u>	<u>Inferred Personal Characteristic</u>
33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,	Had a distinct ethnic/cultural background Was ambitious Took initiative Did not look away Had compassion on someone of a different ethnicity/culture
34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.	Spent time Knew "first aid" Was prepared with supplies Was generous with his property Knew of resources to help Was generous with his time and skills
35. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.	Was a busy person Had money Delegated and worked with others Was generous with his money Was dependable Was trusted by others

Although this is a parable and a teaching method, it is interesting to think of it as a true story, and speculate what the effect was on the man who had been beaten and left half dead. Imagine his attitude toward Samaritans following the possible life-saving kindness shown to him. Imagine this beaten man attempting to develop the characteristics of the Good Samaritan. Imagine him working to be prepared and generous as the Good Samaritan was, developing a desire to "pay it forward." Such spreading of true neighborly characteristics and behaviors is seen as a key ingredient in a recipe for a Beloved Community. Beloved Community is a term that had been used by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to describe a group of people united in the cause of respecting and caring for each other--working for the prosperity of every person.

In such a group of people, the individuals would naturally begin to view each other as family, brothers and sisters of the human race. The final portion of this article is a proposed set of practical steps in assisting a group of people to transition from being neighbors to becoming like family.

From Neighborly to Family

The acronym "FAMILY" has been used in another context to serve as a self-assessment of basic behaviors for family strengthening (see the Everyday Family Hero Assessment [put link here]). The letters of the acronym and the definitions are presented below:

- F** Fun: Doing something fun together and laughing together
- A** Affection: Showing affection to each other by words or actions
- M** Meals: Sharing meals together and having conversations during the meals
- I** Intelligence: Learning something new together
- L** Listening: Listening to each other to try to really understand each other
- Y** Yearning: Strongly desiring to improve the relationship

For the purpose of helping a group of people transition from neighbors to family, it is proposed that the same acronym and definitions of behaviors be used, and that the sequence of those behaviors be in the exact reverse order of the letters in the acronym – –Y L I M A F.

For example, individuals wanting to become more like family would first need to yearn, or strongly desire such a relationship to develop.

Second, deep active listening to each other, with the desire to sincerely better understand each other is an essential ingredient in this process.

Third, is the intelligence step, or learning things together. Such activities help people to further better understand each other. In such learning situations people experience mutual closeness which naturally occurs when individuals are both learning from and teaching others skills and knowledge.

Fourth, having meals together stimulates further bonding which flows from sharing food, conversations, and time together.

Fifth, mutual affection shown through compliments, handshakes, hugs, and spontaneous simple acts of service can more naturally result through this family strengthening process.

Finally, the step of having fun together further cements the unity from positive shared experiences.

Consider the team-building, friendly competition, laughing, physical and mental exertion, and other body-mind-spirit involvement which occurs when 2 or more people have fun together.

Summary

In summary, we learn from the parable of the Good Samaritan that true neighbors are not simply people who are in the same location, but are people who actively seek the welfare of others with whom they come in contact. Through developing personal characteristics as taught in the parable, willing individuals can stimulate further genuine neighborliness among others. A sequential process could be followed to further unite willing individuals who desire to become like family. Following such a bonding process could result in the deepening of mutual respect, genuine caring, and the unity experienced in a Beloved Community.

Various social groups, such as neighborhoods, schools, organizations, and communities are encouraged to experiment with this systematic process to test the recipe for mini-Beloved Communities in a world of desperate people who have been wounded and left half dead.

