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INTENTIONAL LOVE



When has a wrong turn led to a pleasant surprise?

QUESTION #1

Go out of your way to love others.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

What do the following have in common?

- ▶ Alexander Fleming found mold in a petri dish had killed all the bacteria around itself. We now have penicillin.¹
- ▶ Percy Spencer walked in front of a magnetron and the peanut butter candy bar in his pocket melted. This led him to create the microwave oven.²
- ▶ On a hike, Georges de Mestral noticed burrs clinging to his pants. This gave him the idea for Velcro®.³

All these discoveries were made by accident; they stumbled onto a discovery that would shape part of history going forward.

These may have been happy accidents, but we can't approach the Christian life that way. Following Jesus does not mean stumbling around in the dark hoping for a good result; following Jesus is an intentional act of obedience. If we desire to be a welcoming people, we won't get there by accident. We will only get there through intentional acts of love. It's a standard of love that goes the extra mile.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 10:25-28

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” ²⁷ And he answered, “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

Jesus used a powerful story to teach us what it looks like to intentionally love others. But to fully understand the meaning of the story, we must understand the occasion when Jesus told it. The story of the good Samaritan was prompted by a question from an expert in the law.

Some questions are pure in their intent. A person typically desires to know a certain piece of information. That information may even be vital to their health or future. In those cases, just asking the question is an act of humility, for in asking we are admitting our shortcoming in not knowing the answer ourselves.

But that’s not the attitude that prompted this question. This expert of the law asked a critically important question, but his question was not born of a humble search. This was instead a prideful examination. He had no desire to hear truth from Jesus; instead, he “stood up to put him to the test.” His question was meant to demean and discredit Jesus.

Jesus answered the question by asking one of His own, and knowing the man was an expert in the law, He asked the question in terms of the law. This gave the man what he really wanted: an opportunity to showcase his knowledge. In this man’s mind, he already knew the answer to his own question. To inherit eternal life, he must love God with his entire being, and love his neighbor as himself. Indeed, this was the right answer, though the young expert failed to understand the true implications of those commands.

When has your love for God prompted you to love other people?

QUESTION #2

One such implication is that these two great loves which summarize all the commands of Scripture are linked together. Our love for God comes first from the fact that He loved us (see 1 John 4:19), and that love drives and shapes our love for others. That means our love for others should have these qualities:

- ▶ **We love others unreservedly.** God is no respecter of persons. Nationality, ethnicity, education level, and social standing do not limit or regulate His love. We should not withhold our love for someone based on external appearance, familiarity, or any other reason.
- ▶ **We love others sacrificially.** How much did God's love for us cost Him? It cost Him the life of His One and only Son. This is the highest price He could have paid; yet God was willing to back up His love with action.
- ▶ **We love others proactively.** God's love is not an ivory tower kind of love. Rather, He got down in the muck and mire of a sinful world in the person of Jesus Christ. He did not wait for humanity to cry out to Him, but instead He took the initiative to come to us. We also must be the first movers.

Luke 10:29-32

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.



FINDING MARGIN

Sometimes, it is our own schedules that get in the way of being able to serve at church, minister to others, or even find time to read the Bible and pray. In the space provided, list your typical daily schedule during the week:

	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
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Morning

Noon

Afternoon

Evening

Night

Mark the places you might use to intentionally display love for others. List some options for ways to best spend that time ministering to others, then prioritize them from 1-3 based on which you are most likely to be able to accomplish this month.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

—JOHN 13:34

Although Jesus answered the man's question, he was not satisfied. He wanted a further qualification from Jesus. If this man were to love his neighbor, then he wanted to know specifically who that was.

The spirit behind his second question: "Who is my neighbor?" is one of minimalism. The man wanted to know how little he could do with this "love your neighbor" stuff and still be OK. Jesus calls us to love in a much different way. Jesus wants to move us from asking, "What's the least I have to do?" to "What else can I do?"

Jesus doesn't give us a glimpse into the thoughts behind the actions of the priest and the Levite, but we surely can imagine all the ways they might have justified their indifference and apathy.

The point is that both men found excuses *not* to help, and it probably wasn't that difficult to do so. Indifference was the easier way—and it still is. Every day, we encounter people who are spiritually injured and bleeding on the proverbial roadside. We can always find an excuse for passing them by.

- ▶ It's none of my business.
- ▶ I wouldn't know what to say.
- ▶ I've got enough problems of my own.
- ▶ Someone else is better equipped.

At the bottom of any excuse we offer is a simple failure to love. This is the dirty truth of indifference—it is not an attitude of neutrality; it is an outright denial of the call to love others as God loves them.

We would do well to recognize our tendency to find excuses. Once we recognize our own internal pull toward indifference, then we will be more prepared to actively fight against such indifference. And we fight indifference through intentional—and many times uncomfortable—acts of tangible love.

In what ways do we sometimes justify not helping others in need?

QUESTION #3

Luke 10:33-37

³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

The lawyer whose questions led to this story had sought to justify himself by doing as little as possible for his neighbors. Jesus gave the Jews a hero they hated because of his race, and yet this Samaritan went above and beyond any reasonable expectation in order to help someone in need. As we look at the intentional acts of love and mercy the Samaritan showed, we are to do the same.

- ▶ **Be people of awareness.** We must make it our business to be people of awareness. We must educate ourselves on the lives and issues facing the individuals we encounter each day. Until we do so, we will always simply be passing on the other side of the road.
- ▶ **Be people of compassion.** The Samaritan in the story wasn't motivated because a crowd was watching him. He was internally motivated by compassion. We should be asking God to fill us with the same love and compassion that motivated Jesus to be the friend of the friendless.
- ▶ **Be people of margin.** The reason the Samaritan was able to give of his resources is because he had built in some margin. This is a good lesson for us because most of us have zero margins in our lives. We should assume God will bring needs into our path every day that will cost us and arrange our schedules, finances, and other resources to have room to meet those needs.

When has someone taken risks or made sacrifices to demonstrate God's love to you?

QUESTION #4

How can the truths of these verses help our group be more welcoming?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

We might accidentally stumble upon a situation that requires our help, but none of us are going to accidentally love and serve someone else. We only do this with intention. Choose one of the following applications.

- ▶ **Get to know someone.** How intentional are you when you come to worship? This week, intentionally seek someone out you aren't familiar with and ask that person a few questions to get to know him or her.
- ▶ **Trim your schedule.** How much margin is in your life? Evaluate your finances and schedule, and cut back so that you have room to meet the needs of others God brings your way.
- ▶ **Encourage someone.** Who is one person you know that is struggling, but to whom you have been indifferent? Schedule a time to sit down with that person this week.



Let's gear our lives so that we are ready to intentionally take advantage of opportunities God brings our way to express His love to others.

My thoughts

1. "Sir Alexander Fleming-Biographical," *Nobelprize.org*, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/1945/fleming-bio.html.

2. Steven Tweedie, "How the Microwave Was Invented by a Radar Engineer Who Accidentally Cooked a Candy Bar in His Pocket," *Business Insider*, July 3, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-the-microwave-oven-was-invented-by-accident-2015-4>.

3. Jake Swearingen, "An Idea that Stuck: How George de Mestral Invented the Velcro Fastener," *The Vindicated*, November 1, 2016, <http://nymag.com/vindicated/2016/11/an-idea-that-stuck-how-george-de-mestral-invented-velcro.html>.