

### ***My Neighbor Is Someone Who Appears on My Path***

Christians are by nature people who care deeply about the problems of our world. When we hear about human suffering—whether famine somewhere in Africa, earthquakes in Asia, or Christians persecuted somewhere around the world – we are affected and saddened by these human tragedies. We feel moved to pray for the victims, but we can also feel frustrated that there is little, if anything, more that we can do.

Especially for those who are particularly sensitive to human suffering, the problems of the world can at times seem overwhelming. Some people suffer from a mild but almost constant form of depression that is not rooted in anything that is happening in their own lives, but rather is a result of the general malaise of the world in which we live.

Thinking biblically, we must remember that this is a fallen world. We see constant reminders of this reality in the 24/7 news cycle that we are not in heaven, but on earth. Our world is a place where evil and tragedy are present, often nearer to us than we would like. There is plenty of bad to go with the good—lots of suffering amid the joy.

We can at times be so burdened by the problems of the world that we feel paralyzed—unable to help, unable to act. Because we can't do everything, we end up not doing anything, despite the fact that we truly care and genuinely desire to help in some way.

With this in mind, the story of the Good Samaritan can function as a source of comfort. It can help us realize that we are not responsible for solving all the world's problems, thus freeing us to act when we have the opportunity.

“Opportunity” is the operative word. Who are our neighbors? Our neighbors are those who appear on our paths, thus giving us an opportunity to help them. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we can reasonably assume that none of the three people who found a man beaten by the side of the road had awakened that morning intent on going out and solving one or more of the world's big problems. They were each merely going about their business for that day when an opportunity they had not anticipated landed on their path, literally. Two of them declined to act on this opportunity; the Good Samaritan chose to seize it.

One of the greatest challenges facing preachers and teachers in our churches is to exhort followers of Christ to do what they can do without making them feel guilty for not doing what they can't do. Too many people feel guilty for, or at least troubled by, not doing anything about problems they cannot do anything about—for not helping people they are not in a position to help. Pause and let this reality sink in.

Imagine someone in the community has a child who was injured. Their insurance payments have run out. They need a million dollars. I know many Christians who are so caring that they would donate the million dollars in a second, no questions asked. The problem is they don't have it to give. The best they can do is donate 10 or 15 dollars and perhaps help organize a fundraiser.

Around the country and all over the world, every day—every second in fact—someone is facing a crisis. An elderly person falls and breaks a hip, a young mother is diagnosed with cancer, a family loses their

home to a fire or to a mortgage payment they can't make. These stories grieve us, but the reality is that none of us is Superman. We have neither the opportunity nor the ability to solve all of these problems.

**We need to simplify our Christian living.** Instead of being overwhelmed by problems we cannot solve, we need to pay attention to those people and those opportunities God has placed on our paths. Who are the people whom God allows you the privilege of coming into contact with on a regular basis? Those persons are your neighbors. It's that simple.

These neighbors don't necessarily have to live next door or even on your street. They could be children or families in another part of the world who somehow landed on your path, and with whom you have built a long-distance relationship. **The main point is that once we are freed of the burden of feeling that we have to solve all the world's problems, we are better able to notice the opportunities that surround us.** We are free to experience the joy that comes from serving others—the same joy the Good Samaritan must have felt from giving help and comfort to someone in need.

I don't want to put anyone on a guilt trip. But I do want to challenge followers of Christ to heed the example of the Good Samaritan. Stop and think about the opportunities that you regularly notice on your path, as you live, that allow you to be someone who cares for someone – a helpful neighbor to a neighbor in need.

Sometimes the simplest acts of kindness—a card for someone in the hospital or a plate of cookies for the new family in town that is still trying to make friends and find their way—can be the most meaningful ways to care. Don't look for a huge need or an extravagant opportunity – just ask God to open your eyes to those on your path who need a neighbor that day. Then, keep your eyes open.

It's a good idea to start the day spending time in prayer and Bible study. One prayer I regularly pray is: "Lord, bring someone today across my path who needs to know about Jesus and Your love for us." It's amazing how when I pray that, He very often answers in just a few hours.

God will do the same for you. Don't be burdened by problems that you can't do anything about. But look for someone on your path whom you have the opportunity to help. That person is your neighbor.

Excerpted & adapted from Wayne Gordon's book, *Who Is My Neighbor? Lessons Learned From a Man Left for Dead*. Baker Publishing Group.

