

Who Is My Neighbor?

by Dr. Bobby Blanton, Lake Norman Baptist Church

It was going to be a relaxing evening, or so I thought. My wife was putting the finishing touches on our evening meal. Our teens were doing...well, whatever it is that they do. I had the evening free of usual church meetings. Our son, in high school at the time, decided to choose this time to address some emergency. He informs us that he needed to go to the nearby gas station to pick up something that just couldn't wait. I tried to discourage this late dash to the store by insisting that supper was about ready. Of course supper paled in comparison to whatever the particular emergency was in that moment. Our son promised to be back "in just a couple of minutes." Yeah. A couple of minutes came and went and were followed by more and more minutes of cold supper and stewing dad. The period of time in which this event took place was B.C.—"Before Cellphones." There was no way to call him and hurry the "emergency" process along. Finally I decided go to the station myself and by this time I was certain that when I saw my son there was going to be another emergency of a different sort. I wasn't in a good mood and being the prophet that I am, I could foretell that this wasn't going to end well for my son.

But something about this didn't seem right. My son had proven himself dependable. This didn't seem like him. As I pulled into the station my son's car was nowhere to be found. The clerk behind the counter told me he had seen a teenage boy and car meeting my son's description earlier, but that three men had gotten into his car and they had driven away. The clerk pointed to an abandoned car in the parking lot and said that the three men had driven up in that car and had left it, getting into my son's car.

You can imagine what I thought. I didn't know if I needed to be angry or panicked. After waiting for some time, I finally spotted my son's car pulling into the parking lot and sure enough, three strange-looking men got out of his car with him. I pulled up beside them and demanded an explanation. My son tells me that these men needed a ride into Charlotte to get a spare tire from someone they knew, but the one they got didn't fit their car either so he was going to have to take them back into Charlotte again; West Charlotte.

That's when I pulled the plug. I told my son he needed to go straight home. By now it was getting late and there was no way I was going to let him take these strangers into West Charlotte late at night. They would just have to find another way. The three men tried to plead their case, but to no avail. After all, I was a seasoned veteran of standing firm in the wake of protest and whining over a decision I'd made. (You don't moderate church business meeting without gaining some benefit!)

There...I had done it. I put an end to this crazy night. We were going home. But it wasn't over yet, not by a long shot. I'll never forget the look on my son's face or what he said in that moment. He said, "Dad, isn't this what you preach on Sundays?" In that moment I knew what the Wizard of Oz must have felt like when Toto pulled the curtain back.

To make an already long story a bit shorter, I did send my son home, but I drove those guys into West Charlotte late that night myself. Obviously things turned out well for me, but I had learned an important lesson.

Now let me say that I'm no way implying here that you should take note of what I did and "go and do likewise." Remember that I didn't want to do it myself and only did it by default. But it does remind me of a seminary class discussion way back in the day. My professor, Dr. Raymond Brown, in summarizing Luke 10 made the point that "our neighbor is anyone who needs our help." I've never forgotten that.

And I'll also never forget what I learned that night: Needs aren't always met in a sterile or safe environment. Life is messy and often dangerous. The Samaritan knew that. Helping the injured man required him to take a risk. How did he know the man's attackers were not still lurking in the shadows and would attack him? He didn't. And neither do we know what lies in the shadows of the needs we encounter.

On second thought, maybe "Who is my neighbor?" isn't the right question. Maybe we must start with, "What are the needs around me?" Once I define the needs, then maybe I'm better able to identify my neighbor. So look around. What do you see? What are the needs in your community? These are our neighbors. And as the Samaritan, so must we "go and do likewise."

Special thanks to Pastor Bobby Blanton who wrote this LeaderLesson for us!

Dr. Bobby Blanton became the Senior Pastor of Lake Norman Baptist Church in 1997. Prior to coming to LNBC, he served as pastor of three other churches located in NC and SC.

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