

## Sermon: Love and grace

### God's character

Matthew 5:43-48

God loves the righteous and the unrighteous.

### Surpassing the Pharisees

It's easy to be kind to people who aren't annoying you.

Someone has to bridge the divides.

It takes a miracle to love those who don't deserve it.

Proverbs 24:17-18

## Bible Study: Love and grace

### Getting to know you

1. Have you ever received help from someone outside of your close circle of friends and family? How did it make you feel?

### Going deeper

2. Read Luke 10:25-37. Is it surprising to you that the Pharisee questioning Jesus answered his own question in the same way Jesus would have? What does this say about the uniqueness of Jesus' teaching?

Jesus taught the same principles as God's word so he taught principles similar to the Pharisees. The biggest difference was in the application. *How* do you love your neighbor? Is it a begrudging duty you do to receive God's approval or is a joyful service from a transformed, loving heart? Is it limited to what a natural human being can accomplish (loving easy to love people) or what only God can put in a person's heart?

3. Why do you think Jesus made the “villains” of the story a priest and a Levite?

Perhaps Jesus wanted to show that mere religious rituals and status were not enough to fulfill the demands of the transformed life God desires.

4. Jesus made the hero of the story a Samaritan, perhaps the most hated ethnic group for the Jewish people. What does this teach us about loving our neighbor?

There is no limit to who can be our neighbor except our own prejudices.

5. How can we do a better job of loving our neighbors who aren't like us?

There can be many correct answers here. Here are some ideas I believe are essential.

- a. We often put people in categories and dismiss them as a member

of an “outsider” group. We need to see each person as a special creation child of God made in his image. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”

b. We Christians believe that it is important to have the answers. But God's word encourages us to listen more than we speak. James 1:19-20 says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” We should listen and only then speak. We should also be slow to anger. I've actually heard people tell me how offended they are that people are so easily offended. If someone else is offended, even if they confront you in anger, you can make a choice to listen and not be quick to be angry in return. Perhaps if you listen to see their point of view, you can defuse the anger instead of responding in kind.

c. We need to let God transform us. Answering anger with anger, dismissing others, getting our pride hurt, etc. are all natural human responses. God wants us to transcend these. 1 Corinthians 3:3 teaches, “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?”

### Putting it into practice

6. Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone you have wronged from whom you need forgiveness? What is the first step in reconciliation? Put it into practice by taking that first step this week.