

January 3, 2016

Title: Be the Difference**[Slide 1]****Text: Luke 10:25-37****Who is my neighbor?****Spiritual selfie, anyone?**

We know all about "selfies." Most of us have probably taken them at one time or another. It is estimated that people take over 1,000,000 each day. The iPhone 4 is credited with the explosion in selfie-taking. Why? Because it introduced the front-facing camera that made taking a selfie so easy.

[Slide 2]

It doesn't matter if it's the Matterhorn or Mt. Everest, the Grand Tetons or the Grand Canyon. Mother Nature's greatest vistas are mere backdrop for the selfie. Funny how even the world's tallest mountain is cut down to size if you put your face close enough to the camera.

But you don't need a smartphone with a front-facing camera to take a selfie. Luke tells a story about a lawyer who decided to engage Jesus in a theological discussion. His goal? You might say he was trying to take a "spiritual selfie."

He came to Jesus with a trick question:

[Slide 3]*Luke 10:25 NIV*

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Two things stand out:

- First, the lawyer has *ulterior motives*. His intention is hostile. He is planning to show the world that *he* is the theological and legal expert by unmasking Jesus as a heretic.

- Second, the lawyer's question says that this *is all about him*. He has his camera in "front-facing mode": "What must **I** do to inherit eternal life?"

It's not about you!

Jesus answers by flipping the camera into "back-facing mode," as it were. He asks the man a question that puts the focus on God and the rest of the human race!

[Slide 4]

Luke 10:26 NIV

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Now, instead of a giant self-portrait with a tiny Mt. Everest in the background, we see the camera pointing at the matchless God of the Universe. He alone is to be the focal point of our entire lives. No room for squeezing our own face into this picture!

And as our gaze comes down to Planet Earth, we see the focus not on ourselves, but on others – our neighbors. In short, Jesus is saying: "It's not about you! If you want to inherit eternal life, you have to keep your spiritual camera facing *the other way*."

"Who is my neighbor?"

But the lawyer isn't ready to give up trying to perfect his spiritual selfie. He makes one last attempt to take the picture:

[Slide 5]

Luke 10:29 NIV

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

There it is again: the spiritual camera in "front-facing mode."

- He wants to “justify himself,” and put himself in a good light at Jesus’ expense.
- His question says it all: “Who is **my** neighbor?”
- Who is so blessed to live close enough to the all-important **me?**
- *Who qualifies to join me in a group selfie?*

Needless to say, this little discussion could have gone down one rabbit trail after another. But Jesus has a different idea. He tells a story.

Which was a neighbor?

Selfie Mode:

It’s a story about a man who got mugged on a dangerous stretch of mountain road between Jericho and Jerusalem.

[Slide 6]

Luke 10:30 NIV

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.”

Two members of the religious establishment happen upon this poor individual and are confronted with a dilemma: do they try to help him out, or do they avoid potential contamination? If he is dead, or dies while they are administering first aid, they will be ritually “unclean” and unable to fulfill their religious duties. They both make the choice to look out for themselves:

[Slide 7]

Luke 10:31-32 NIV

“A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”

Think of their response as “camera in selfie-mode.” They see the man’s need, but their own faces fill the screen. They won’t do anything that will jeopardize their standing in the community.

The Samaritan:

The third person in the story who comes along is a Samaritan. The Samaritans and Jews despised each other. The Jews considered the Samaritans as at best half-pagan. In no way would they have ever considered each other neighbors!

But *this* Samaritan doesn't have his spiritual camera in selfie mode:

[Slide 8]

Luke 10:33-35 NIV

"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'"

Like the two Jewish religious people, the Samaritan happens upon the mugging victim. But then something totally different happens:

- Instead of seeing *himself* in the screen, he sees *nothing but the other person*.
- Instead of feeling the need to protect himself, he takes pity on the stranger.
- Instead of passing by on the other side of the road, he administers first aid.
- Instead of hurrying away, he puts the man on his own donkey and brings him to an inn.
- He pays the innkeeper to care for the man and promises to return to pay any further expenses.

"Which was a neighbor?"

Jesus ends the story with a question for the lawyer:

[Slide 9]

Luke 10:36-37a NIV

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Funny things happen when you switch the camera from front-facing mode to back-facing mode. The lawyer thought he could draw Jesus into a debate about *who* qualified as a neighbor in Jewish law. Jesus turned the question on its head:

[Slide 10]

"It is no longer whether the victim of the highway robbery could be considered legally a "neighbor" to either the priest, the levite, or the Samaritan, but rather which one of them acted as a "neighbor" to the unfortunate victim." (Fitzmeyer, The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV, p. 884)

Another commentator puts it this way:

"The principle underlying the question is that while mere neighborhood does not create love, love does create neighborliness." (T.W. Manson, as quoted by Fitzmeyer, p. 884)

When we switch off selfie mode and point the camera at the needs of others, we open the door to *be a neighbor*.

Be the Difference

Eternal Life!

Eternal life. That was the quest of the lawyer in his question for Jesus. So what does eternal life look like? It looks like the *opposite of a spiritual selfie*. It looks like a hated Samaritan becoming savior and servant of a despised Jew. It looks like what Jesus did for you and me.

Eternal life is not something you can *get* to add to your accomplishments or to give you a sense of security about the future. Eternal life is God's Life in you. God fills the frame – you love Him with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Restoring God's broken world fills your view – you love your neighbor as yourself. And Love defines your neighbor, not your prejudices or preferences.

Do life:

Eternal Life is something *you do*, not just something you *have*. It's not an insurance policy. It's not just a cipher of data on a hard drive in heaven. It's your new life. That's why Jesus finishes the conversation with:

[Slide 11]

Luke 10:37b NIV

"Go and do likewise."

Go *be* the Good Samaritan in your world. Stop taking spiritual selfies. Put God and his love on your screen each and every day. You are put here in this world to *do eternal life*.

Dare to be the difference:

[Slide 12]

God is calling us as a church to "dare to be the difference" this year.

Dare:

- D: Discover a place to be a difference
- A: Act
- R: Report what you have done
- E: Encourage others to take the journey

All you need to do is switch your spiritual camera out of selfie mode. You'll see God and His love in a whole new way!

Or, as Jesus put it: "Do this and you will live!"