

Christian Leadership in a Multifaith World Curriculum Designed by Interfaith America & CCCU

Module 1 – Christian Foundations for Interfaith Bridge-Building *Activity 4 – A 21st Century Good Samaritan*

Overview

In this activity, students will revisit the Parable of the Good Samaritan, seeking to draw lessons for interfaith engagement from this familiar story.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Articulate ways in which the Parable of the Good Samaritan can help shape their thinking about Christians' engagement with those who aren't Christian.

External Materials

- Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Activity Content

Most Christians are familiar with the two-part biblical command to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Luke 10:27). And we've also heard the story Jesus told that helps to demonstrate what it means to love our neighbor--the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story, a man was attacked and horribly beaten by robbers who abandoned him by the roadside. Two religious leaders traveling that same path saw the man but left him unattended. Finally, a third man (a Samaritan) stopped to help, taking his own time, energy, and money to do so.

Those who have grown up anywhere near a church have heard numerous Sunday school lessons and sermons based on this story. You might have been urged to be helpful and kind, unlike the two religious leaders who didn't even stop to help the injured man. You might have been guided to think of the ways in which the Samaritan was willing to inconvenience himself and maybe even put himself in danger by stopping to help. You might have been challenged to consider that the Samaritan would have been viewed by many of Jesus' first followers as a *racial* outsider and thus an unlikely hero.

While these lessons from the story are meaningful, we also need to consider the possible implications of this parable for interfaith relations. After all, Samaritans weren't just racial outsiders--they would more importantly have been seen by Jesus' followers as *religious* outsiders, criticized and even despised for their beliefs. In Jesus' day, notes biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine, hatred toward Samaritans was so great that if Jewish hearers of this story were to imagine themselves as the injured man, they might have thought that they'd rather die than be saved by a Samaritan (Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, p. 96).

If this story were merely about the importance of helping those in need, Jesus could have had the hero be another religious leader with better priorities than those who abandoned the man instead of assisting him. Or he could have had the hero be a farmer or carpenter or fisherman--someone like any number of Jesus' followers. But he didn't. The hero of this story is a supposed religious enemy who not only *knows* what love of neighbor looks like but who also acts in ways that demonstrate neighborly love!

In this parable, Jesus challenges those who think that it's only the followers of their own religion who know how to demonstrate love of neighbor. This challenge comes through the story's hero--a religious outsider, a heretic. Not only is the Samaritan the character in this story who goes out of his way to show love and kindness, but Jesus is also saying that even religious leaders and theological experts have something to learn from a religious outsider about how to interpret and obey the law (David I. Smith, *Learning from the Stranger*, p. 75). Note, for example, that Jesus tells this story in response to a question that a theological "expert" asks him in the verses that immediately precede this parable (Luke 10:25-29).

Let's look at this parable more closely, as you spend some time engaging in it imaginatively.

Student Assignment Options

1. Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Since this story is so familiar, you might find it helpful to read it in more than one translation of the Bible.
2. Write an "updated" version of the story, inserting the following updates to the story that might help emphasize some of its key lessons for you as a Christian engaging with others who believe differently than you do:
 - a. The unnamed man who gets attacked: Imagine him as a Christian whom you know and care about (A friend? Family member? Someone from your church or Bible study?)
 - b. The two religious leaders who don't stop to help the hurt man: Imagine them as well-respected Christians (Your pastor? Christian author whose books you've studied?)
 - c. The Samaritan: Imagine him as a person from a religion that you strongly disagree with or that you're possibly quite negative toward.
3. Now examine (and ideally discuss with a Christian friend or group) your updated version of the story. Focus on some of the following so that this exercise can really prompt your thinking:
 - a. Why do you think Jesus chose a religious outsider as the hero for this story? What point(s) could Jesus have been making?
 - b. Why didn't the Christian leaders stop to help the hurt man? If you had been one of those who kept going and didn't stop to help, why wouldn't you have stopped to help?
 - c. Look at the way that you re-imagined the Samaritan (as a person from a religion that you strongly disagree with): Do a little research about the actual beliefs of that religion when it comes to helping others. If you know someone from that religion (maybe someone you work with or have observed at an internship), what neighborly actions have you seen them do?

4. Now imagine *yourself* as one of the characters in this story--either as the man who was attacked or as one of the two religious leaders who didn't stop to help. What are you thinking and feeling? How might you react to the person who helped you? (To help you really imagine yourself in the story, write in the first person: "I was walking in a dangerous neighborhood...")
 - a. Don't imagine yourself as the Good Samaritan. Instead, stretch yourself by putting yourself in the shoes of the victim in the story or as one of the people who should have helped but didn't.

Going Deeper: Additional Resources

- *Read*: "Why I'm Glad I Skipped Large Group" by Greg Damhorst in *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World* (IVP Academic, 2016) (pp. 155-157).
 - Discuss with classmates what you learned about the importance of cooperating with people from different religions in acts of service.
- *Watch*: "[Speaking Through Service](#)" by Rami Nashashibi, Executive Director of IMAN (Inner-City Muslim Action Network) (45 minutes)
 - As you watch, make a list of what you have in common with and might learn from this Muslim man about the importance of serving others.