

## Unshakeable Love, Unshakeable Faith

### What Do You Say?

Whether you have been a Christ follower for a few weeks, a few years or decades, you have made some conclusions about the Christian life. You may not have actually stated those conclusions, but they have “been there” influencing your thinking and your way of life. If you were to summarize what’s most important in following Christ, *what would you say?*

Jesus put this question to someone very knowledgeable about how God’s people are to live. The person he asked was a scribe. Your Bible may say “a teacher of the Law” (Luke 10:25a TEV), “a certain lawyer” (KJV) or “an expert in the law” (NIV).

The Law included both the written Law and the Oral Law. We mostly think of the written Law as the Ten Commandments, but to a first century scribe, it would include the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). The Oral Law contained specific applications of the broad moral laws found in the Torah. These applications were not written down. They were memorized and passed from person to person, from generation to generation by word of mouth.

The scribes were experts in the Law. They could quote it, interpret it, teach it, and settle disputes regarding the Law. This was no small feat as there were numerous commandments. The scribes identified 613 commandments—365 negative and 248 positive.

That’s a lot to know and to obey! Consequently, the scribes engaged in spirited discussions about the Law: how you might summarize the Law, what were the greatest commandments, or what was really needed to receive eternal life. Which of these discussion topics did the scribe in Luke 10:25 appear to be interested in?

What was the scribe’s motive for asking? (Luke 10:25a)

This could simply mean the scribe had a hostile attitude or it could mean he was hoping Jesus would take a side. If He did, this would automatically cause Him disfavor among some of the scribes—the ones who disagreed with Him.

Jesus didn’t readily answer. Instead He asked two questions. What were those two questions? (Luke 10:26)

(1)

(2)

This was Jesus’ way of saying to the scribe, *what would you say?*

What did the scribe say? What was his answer? (Luke 10:27)

What did Jesus say about the scribe's answer? (Luke 10:28a)

How does your conclusion (the one you wrote above about the Christian life) compare with the scribe's conclusion?

If your conclusion isn't the same as his or anywhere close, don't feel badly. Mine wasn't either! My answer had four components: prayer, Bible study, church and missions. If you pressed me further about having an unshakeable faith, I would say having an early morning quiet time of prayer and Bible study. This early morning time has been a stabilizing, motivating and sustaining factor in my Christian life. Because of this I can understand and appreciate the first part of the scribe's answer about loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, but the neighbor part? I'm not so sure. Why isn't loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength enough? Why is the *people connection* important? Doesn't church history show that some hermits were really religious people? And don't those people today who practice and promote long periods of silent withdrawal believe what they are doing is what's most important in being a Christ follower?

Questions like these reveal why periodically we need to return to the Bible to check to see if our conclusions line up with what Jesus says and expects. His conversation with this scribe and other conversations He had reveal the importance of loving others as well as loving God. Let's look at three of those conversations.

(1) *Conversation with a rich young man* (Matthew 19:16-22).

What question did the rich young man ask Jesus? (Matthew 19:16)

What did Jesus say the young man ought to do if he wanted "to enter life" (Matthew 19:17b TEV)?

What kind of clarification did the young man want? (Matthew 19:18a)

When Jesus clarified what commandments the young rich man ought to be keeping, were they commandments related to loving God or to loving others? (Matthew 19:18b-19)

When the young man was dissatisfied with Jesus' answer, he pressed Him for more. What else did Jesus suggest that He do? (Matthew 19:21)

(2) *Conversation with a Pharisee* who was also a scribe (Matthew 22:34-40).

What did the Pharisee ask Jesus? (Matthew 22:36)

Was this question different from the scribe's in the Luke 10 conversation that we looked at above?

What was the Pharisee's motive for asking? (Matthew 22:35)

Who answered the question this time, Jesus or the scribe? (Matthew 22:37-39)

What was His answer? (Matthew 22:37-39)

(3) *Conversation with a "teacher of the law"* (Mark 12:28-34a).

What had this teacher noticed about Jesus? (Mark 12:28)

What question did he have for Jesus? (Mark 12:28b)

Was Jesus' answer to the "teacher" the same as the answer He gave to the Pharisee?

Did Jesus equalize these two commandments of loving God and loving neighbors or did He seem to indicate that one was more important than the other? (12:29a,31a)?

Perhaps you might have felt like there was too much repetition in these conversations, but I want us to be sure to understand the importance of these two commandments. Obeying them should be prominent in the lives of Christians. Of the two, I am more perplexed by the commandment to love our neighbors. *What do you say* we explore what that means? Come, study along with me to see what loving others means and doesn't mean. Let's see if loving others has any connection with having an unshakeable faith.

## **Who is My Neighbor?**

How do you react to a less-than-stellar job performance evaluation? Or to a low test score? Or to unsolicited or sometimes even solicited advice? Do you want to defend yourself? Explain how hard you have tried? Describe what you've been doing right?

Maybe the scribe in Luke 10:25-29 felt that way after telling Jesus what he saw as necessary for receiving eternal life. His answer was right. Jesus assured him of this (Luke 10:28a), but Jesus also said, “*Do this and you will live*” (Luke 10:28b TEV, author’s italics).

*Do this?! Do this?! What did Jesus mean?* Wasn’t he already loving God and loving his neighbor? He was confident that he was, but wait a minute. Maybe Jesus had a different definition of neighbor. A little insecurity surfaced. He had better be sure so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29b TEV).

How would you answer his question?

I probably would have said people who live near me—those on the left, on the right and across the street. That’s pretty close to the first definition in my dictionary: a neighbor is one who lives near or next to another.

For the scribe, the definition he was living by was broader than that. His definition meant those like himself—his fellow Jews and the sojourners among them who adopted their faith. This definition is one they had been following for a long time going all the way back to the time of Moses. The definition did not include Gentiles or half-Jews such as the Samaritans were. For example, some Jews said that it was illegal to help a Gentile woman when giving birth because that would be bringing another Gentile into the world! The scribe was pretty sure he was correct in his thinking and practice, but he needed to know if he and Jesus were on the same page. If they were, perhaps more commendation would follow. He liked the thought of that; hence the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus answered his question by telling him a story, and here it is.

“There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Take care of him,’ he told the innkeeper, ‘and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him’” (Luke 10: 30-35 TEV).

This was a compelling and gripping story to the listening scribe, because he would have picked up on details that we might or might not be aware of.

- The man who was hurt and robbed was foolish to travel the road from Jerusalem to Jericho alone. Robberies were common on this road. It was a steep, winding road through desolate country. The area was filled with caves. The sudden turns in the road

made it an ideal place for robbers to fall on their victims and then hide in the caves and ravines.

- The priest and the Levite were religious professionals. A priest performed religious duties such as offering the morning and evening sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. A Levite performed lesser Temple duties such as washing the sacred vessels, preparing the lamps, and furnishing the musical liturgies.
- The Samaritan was part of a group that Jews had long-standing disdain for so the scribe would expect him to be the villain of Jesus' story.
- Samaria was north of where Jerusalem and Jericho were located so the Samaritan was traveling in an area where he would have been intensely disliked.

With these details in mind, reread the story (Luke 10:30-35) perhaps in another Bible version, read the conclusion of the conversation (10:36-37) and answer the following questions.

How many people saw the man who was robbed and beaten lying beside the road?

Which one of the three helped the man who was robbed?

What did he feel for the man that motivated him to help?

What did he do?

What question did Jesus ask the scribe? (Luke 10:36b).

What's your answer to His question?

What was the scribe's answer? (Luke 10:37a)

Why didn't Jesus just say that up front when the scribe asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Why did Jesus tell him a story instead of giving him a definition?

How did Jesus' story broaden the scribe's understanding of who is a neighbor?

Does the broader understanding of who is a neighbor include people who might act foolishly and bring trouble on themselves as the traveler's recklessness had done?

Does it mean including those who are different from us?

Does Jesus' story broaden *your* understanding of who is a neighbor? Check which ones of the following is *your* neighbor according to Jesus' conversation with the scribe.

- a fellow human being
- an American
- someone who needs my help
- someone of a different color
- someone on the other side of town
- someone on the other side of the world
- someone who speaks a different language
- someone of a different religion
- someone in my family
- someone like me

Did Jesus' instructions for the scribe change after he learned and gave the correct answer to the question of who is my neighbor? (Compare Luke 10:28 and Luke 10:37b)

Jesus' conversation with the scribe teaches us that anyone is our neighbor who needs our help. What affects my neighbor affects me. What I do affects him or her. I may be the helper today but tomorrow I may be the needy one. Our survival as a people and our quality of life depend on helping each other. No wonder Jesus said—and still says—“Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37b KJV).

One Bible scholar said the full force of His words does not come through in the English translation. For in the Greek text “you” is emphatic. “*You* unlike the priest and Levite, *you* like the Samaritan, *do* likewise.” It's up to us to act. We may do without loving, but we cannot love without doing. Compassion, to be real compassion, must result in deeds.

## How Do I Love My Neighbors?

When writing my book *He Said What?!: Jesus' Amazing Words to Women*, I wanted to include an illustration about a pastor who admitted that he did not like one of his parishioners. I appreciated his honesty but some early manuscript readers did not. Their reaction was, “He said what?!” They did not like the illustration. One of them said, “I can't stand the thought of a

pastor not liking someone who is a member of his congregation.” Because of their reaction, I eliminated the illustration from the book, but I’ve thought a lot about it since. The manuscript readers were seeing loving and liking as going together. Do they? I raise this question now as we study the commandment to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Does neighborly love mean we have to like everyone we help? Become chums with them? Meet them for coffee? Or does Jesus have something else in mind?

Let’s see what clues we can find in the conversation Jesus had with the scribe to help us understand—and practice—neighborly love.

### *In the Commandment*

One clue is in the commandment “Love your neighbor *as you love yourself*” (Luke 10:27a TEV, author’s italics). You take the ways you love your self and do those things for others. You take the regard you have for yourself and regard others in the same way.

When I leave the house on a cold morning, I put on a warm coat because I love myself; therefore, for a neighbor I would \_\_\_\_\_.

When I cut my finger while using a new knife to peel potatoes, I love myself enough to bandage my finger; therefore, for a neighbor to show my love, I would \_\_\_\_\_.

When I’m standing on a corner by a busy street, I don’t step out in front of a speeding truck because I care about myself; therefore, for a neighbor, I would \_\_\_\_\_.

A person is to have the same caring attitude for a neighbor that one would have for oneself. What other words of Jesus’ amplify and undergird this truth? (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31)

To love our neighbors does not mean we have to love them in exactly the same way we love our family members or our best friends. Neighborly love is an act of the will; it is not based on our self esteem or our feelings.

There was a trend for a while in Christian circles to turn the “love your neighbor as you love yourself” commandment around and say, “You can’t love others *until* you love yourself.” I question that. As a girl and a young adulthood, I struggled with low self esteem as many young women do, and it took me a long time to grow out of it. If I had waited until I had a healthy self esteem, I would have missed many opportunities to love others, to develop a missions lifestyle and to grow spiritually.

To be sure, loving others may help raise a person's self-esteem. Sometimes those you love may be so grateful that you are blessed by their response, and you end up feeling glad you helped. You feel better about yourself and your place in the universe because you know you are doing God's will.

Neither do we have to wait until we *feel* like loving before we help. I read about a dynamic Christian speaker who was scheduled to speak at a big meeting. She arrived exhausted from traveling and sick at her stomach. She didn't feel like speaking, but the right thing to do was to think of all those people in the audience so she got up and did what she was supposed to do.

She said, "As I talked, I felt numb, as if I were on some kind of automatic pilot, and I had no positive feeling for what I was doing. I could hear myself talking as if I were some stranger."

After she finished and started to leave the stage, a young woman came up with tears in her eyes. She said to the speaker, "I have never felt or seen the love of Christ in anyone's heart and eyes the way I saw and felt them in yours tonight."

Neighborly love is not having a warm and fuzzy feeling for others. You may not like the people you need to love. It's doing right by others. As the pastor above said, "I don't like everyone in my congregation, but I do love them. If members need help, I'm here for them."

### *In the Story*

Another clue about what neighborly love is like can be found within the parable of the Good Samaritan.

How did the reaction of the Samaritan differ from that of the priest and the Levite to the half dead robber? (Luke 10:30-35)

No doubt the priest and the Levite felt a pang of pity for the wounded man, but they did nothing. What specific actions did the Samaritan take?

Luke 10:34a

Luke 10:34b

Luke 10:35

After noting what the Samaritan did, would you say that neighborly love is passive or active?

How does James 2:15-17 reinforce the truth that loving your neighbor means taking action?

### *In the Conclusion*



Besides loving others as you love yourself and taking action, another clue as to what neighborly love is like is found in the words of the scribe after Jesus finished His story. When Jesus asked him which one acted like a neighbor, the scribe answered, “The one who was kind to him” (Luke 10:37a TEV). If you are ever hesitant about helping someone, ask yourself, What’s the kind thing to do?

This question may not only tell us what to do, but it may help us when a needy neighbor seems undeserving of help. Remember that the man who was robbed in Jesus’ story was foolish for traveling alone on a dangerous road; still the Samaritan helped him. Maybe that’s why the King James Version of the Bible uses the word “mercy” instead of “kind.” What word does your version of the Bible use in Luke 10:37a?

How does the word “kind” or “merciful” help you understand what neighborly love is like?

Whose kindness should be an example to us as we love others? (Titus 3:4)

What did Jesus do that should motivate us to be kind to others? (Ephesians 4:32)

Our focus passage (Luke 10:25-37) reminds us that we should love our neighbors in ways that we love ourselves, that are active and that are kind—basically, doing what’s best for the other person. This is something you can do whether you *like* them or not!

## **Interference**

What would your response have been if you had been in the audience the day Jesus stressed loving our neighbors (Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:39)? I would have said, “Yes!” or shouted, “Amen!” I appreciate the whole concept of loving others, I understand the need for it, and I have been the recipient of many kind acts so it should be easy to love my neighbors, right?

Well, it might be if our acts of kindness always involved warm, fuzzy feelings and we were immediately rewarded, but it doesn’t always work that way. Others things in our lives interfere with loving others. Let’s look at some Scripture passages to see what some of those challenges are.

*Luke 10:30-35*

What might have kept the priest and the Levite from helping the poor man beside the road?

Leviticus 21:1-3

Numbers 19:11-22

What rules do you live by that might keep you at times from helping others?

What religious reasons might Christians give for not helping others?

What could be some other possible reasons why the priest and Levite didn't help?

What emotion did the Samaritan have that the priest and the Levite did not?

What part do your emotions play in motivating you to help others?

*Luke 18:18-25*

In what way was the rich person to love his neighbors? (Luke 18:22b)

What did Jesus say he would have if he did this? (Luke 18:22c)

Why do you think Jesus insisted he do this before following Him?

What was the rich man's reaction? (Luke 18:23)

How might a person's wealth or possessions interfere with loving his neighbors?

*Luke 10:38-42*

Martha and Mary's story immediately follows the parable of the Good Samaritan. I've always wondered if Luke placed it there because it illustrates some of the challenges of loving others. It certainly highlights some that I face.

What did Martha do to show that she wanted to do something for others (Jesus and possibly His disciples)? (Luke 10:38)

What complicated Martha's noble desire? (Luke 10:40a,41)

Who did she blame for her frustration? (Luke 10:40)

Martha had something she wanted to achieve, but her effort turned out to be disappointing and exasperating. I have had this happen to me enough times in my life that I hesitate helping others when I see that much time and effort is going to be involved. This is particularly true after I became a goal-oriented person, and I'm not the only person who feels this way.

Fifteen theological students of similar abilities and faith commitments were asked to participate in an experiment. No particulars about what was involved were given to them.

The fifteen were divided into three groups.

The first five were instructed to report to a certain room and there each one was told privately to proceed immediately to a building across the campus to take a test. They were warned that any delay would lead to lowering of their grade in this project. These five were called the "high hurry" group.

The next five were told to report to the same place, only they were instructed to proceed across campus within the next fifteen minutes. This was about what it would take to get from one place to the other easily but without much margin for delay.

The third five were told individually to report across campus anytime that afternoon. They had up to three hours to do the assignment.

Unknown to any of these fifteen students, individuals with visible problems had been planted along the way. Some were crying, others throwing up, and some bent over in obvious pain. All fifteen of the unsuspecting students had to pass these needy people.

None of the "high hurry" group paused to do anything for any of these people. Two out of "the fifteen minute group" stopped to help, and all five of those in the "non-hurry" group took time to see what they could do for the distressed persons.

Here were students whose beliefs were similar and possessed the kinds of skills that could have been of help in this situation, but those under pressure to be at a certain place at a certain time passed by those needing help.

Ever since I heard about this experiment, it has haunted me because I have places to go, schedules to keep and deadlines to meet. I feel the pressure of time just as the "high hurry" group did. At the same time, I have eyes to see the needs of people along the way. I might be tempted to give up altogether, just stop trying to help if it weren't for Jesus. Loving others wasn't always easy for Him either.

*Matthew 26:36-45*

No greater love for others has ever been expressed than that of Jesus' dying on the cross for our sins so we could have everlasting life. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before His death, though, you don't see Jesus jumping up and down and exclaiming, "Oh, boy, oh, boy, I get to do this. I get to show my love by dying on the cross."

Warm, fuzzy feelings weren't present for Him. What feelings were present? (Matthew 26:37-38)

What did He do to resolve those feelings?

What opposites was he was struggling with?

Which one won out?

What's the principle in this that can help us discipline ourselves to love others when we don't feel like loving?

This prayer of Jesus' and His death on the cross helps me love others. What have you found that helps you?

And we do need help because many things attempt to interfere with our loving others. Several of those things we've listed in today's study—rules, possessions, time, and will, and there are plenty more. What interferes with your loving others?

Another interference for me is the sense that I have to help every one, that I have to respond to every one I see who has a need. That's a mighty weighty responsibility. Here again Jesus' example helps me.

What did Jesus do when the healing of a leper caused the multitudes to follow Him? (Luke 5:15-16)

Of all the sick people gathered around the pool of Bethzatha (TEV spelling), how many did Jesus heal? (John 5:1-8)

These examples remind me that no one human being can meet the needs of all the people we encounter all the time. Jesus' commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" is a principle to live by, always to be at the forefront of our minds and guiding our actions. It's challenging, but it is worthwhile. That's why I'm still saying "Yes!" and shouting "Amen!"

## When God Blesses Loving

In this Bible study, we focused on the second of the two greatest: loving your neighbor. We defined neighbor, discussed what neighborly love is like, and talked about its challenges. As difficult as obeying can be at times, loving your neighbors has some real rewarding aspects. Here are three ways God blesses us for taking action.

*(1) Do this and you will enter the kingdom of God.*

In the Mark 12:28-34 account of a “teacher of the Law” talking with Jesus, what question did he have for Jesus?

To distinguish this questioner from the “teacher of the Law” in Luke 10:25-28, I will reference this one as “teacher.” I refer to the other one as “scribe.”

What was Jesus’ answer to the teacher? (Mark 12:29-31)

What words of praise did the teacher have for Jesus? (Mark 12:32a)

What insight did the teacher have about the importance of obeying the two greatest commandments? (Mark 12:33b)

Why do you think loving God and loving others is more important than offering animal sacrifices to God?

When Jesus noticed how wise the teacher’s answer was, where did Jesus say the teacher was? (Mark 12:34b)

The teacher’s response revealed that he was “not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34b NIV). His openness and humility toward God as well as his teachable spirit indicated that he was close to the kingdom. What would he need to do next to be in the kingdom?

The teacher's understanding of the two commandments and his acceptance of their demands prepared him for becoming a follower of Jesus and being a part of His reign on earth. A new life was available to him—a life in the kingdom of God.

When Jesus spoke about receiving the kingdom of God or entering the kingdom of heaven, He wasn't talking about how to get into heaven after we die. He was speaking about living under His reign through the power of His grace. We "enthroned" Him as our king when we proclaim our faith in Him and live according to His will by loving God and loving others.

*(2) Do this and you will live.*

In our focal passage (Luke 10:25-37), what was the scribe's question? (10:25)

As we saw earlier, Jesus responded by asking him how he would answer. What did the scribe tell Jesus? (Luke 10:27)

After the scribe answered the question, what did Jesus say to him? (Luke 10:28)

What would happen if he took action and loved God and loved his neighbors? (Luke 10:28b)

This conversation started with the scribe asking Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life. Now Jesus assures him that if he loves God wholeheartedly and loves his neighbors he will live. This is more than breathing and having a beating heart. Jesus is speaking of length and of quality.

By eternal life, many of us think that it means going to heaven—and it does include that, but eternal life in the gospels often means a long life—one that begins here and now and continues on into eternity. It is not interrupted by the physical dissolution of the death of the body.

Eternal life also speaks of a quality of life that comes from being in relationship with God and doing what He asks of us. By being obedient, you will have a life that's different from the lives of nonbelievers. People who *put* the commands to love God and to love others *into practice* will have a sense of aliveness because they know they are under the umbrella of God, pleasing Him and seeing changes in the lives of others.

When we regularly refuse to obey the commandments to love God and to love neighbors, we don't lose our salvation. What we lose is the vitality which may show itself in any

number of ways. Our inner peace may be disturbed; we may develop a gloomy outlook on life. We may feel out of sorts with ourselves and sometimes with God. Deep emotional problems may occur, too, such as jealousy, hatred and hostility.

I'd rather have the vibrancy of eternal life, wouldn't you? If you do, obedience is the key; it's also the key to having an unshakeable faith.

*(3) Do this and you will have unshakeable faith.*

How would you define unshakeable faith?

What story did Jesus tell to illustrate unshakeable faith? (Luke 6:46-49, Matthew 7:24-27)

What two foundations did Jesus use to contrast who has unshakeable faith and who doesn't?

What two things are necessary to having unshakeable faith? (Luke 6:47, Matthew 7:24)

What did you *hear* in this Bible study about what's important in being a Christ follower?

What comes next after hearing?

Jesus' parable about the wise and foolish builders teaches us the importance of laying the right foundation for life by being obedient to His teachings. His teachings, as our study has shown, can be summarized in the two greatest commandments: loving God and loving others. Heed these commandments and you will develop a firm foundation for keeping the faith. You never have to be in the dark about what His will is. The two greatest commandments will always provide direction for how to live.

- When your teenager irritates you, ask yourself, "What's the kind way to respond?"
- When the dark clouds of depression hover, ask yourself, "What can I do for someone else today?"
- When co-workers belittle your faith and make fun of you, stay the course by focusing your mind and heart on God.

We never have to get up in the morning and wonder, How does God want me to live today? He wants us to love Him and to love others.

When we base our lives on Jesus' teachings, we'll be prepared to face and to handle the storms that come our way, and they will come. Rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). We are going to have problems and difficulties. This is the nature of life.

It may be hard to take Jesus at His word just as it is hard to build on a rock, but in the long run, it is worth it. To love God and to love others even when we don't feel like loving is the way to be in the kingdom of God, to have eternal life and to have a secure foundation. Unshakeable love produces unshakeable faith.