

Life: Indifference or compassionate action?

March 4, 2013

- *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for March 17 focuses on Luke 10:25-37.*

Our world is not short on hurting people. Everywhere you look, people are struggling. We all know someone battling cancer. We all know someone overwhelmed with loneliness. We all know people without a job, who have lost a child, or are burdened with a broken marriage. There are hurting people everywhere.

And we all are familiar with the deep physical pain that accompanies tragic news in our own lives. When we get a call about a terminal diagnosis or an intense struggle in our close circle of friends and family, our knees get weak, our heart begins to pound and the overwhelming ache, deep in our bellies, begins to throb. The ache keeps us from eating and sleeping and threatens to dominate every moment of our lives. We cannot escape.

But the situation is different when the struggle or the tragedy is facing someone else outside our circle. Perhaps it is a member of our church, a man on a street corner or even an enemy. We see they are faced with cancer, unemployment or broken relationships. Just as the priest and the Levite saw the man hurting on the side of the road, so we see and are aware of these issues. But the pain, the deep ache for our own circle of loved ones, does not accompany the news about a stranger and certainly not for our enemies. We see their pain, but we do not feel their pain.

Loving our neighbor

When the lawyer asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus made it clear he must love God with every part of his being and love

his neighbor as himself. Love is a powerful connection, because love makes us feel what others are feeling.

Jesus said we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We are to love the member of our church, the man on the street corner and even our enemy in such a way that when they experience pain, struggle and heartache, we also feel their pain, just as we would our own. The word Jesus used for “pity” in verse 33 is the Greek word that literally means “to have the bowels yearn.”

When the Samaritan walked past the man on the side of the road, he witnessed the same scene as the priest and the Levite. Each saw the wounds and witnessed the desperation of the man. But after the Samaritan saw the situation, something else happened. The Samaritan went beyond seeing to feeling. His knees got weak, his heart began to pound and the overwhelming ache, deep in his belly, started to throb. The Samaritan felt compassion for the broken man and responded by providing comfort, medical care and financial help.

Loving God

How can we possibly love strangers and enemies the same way we love ourselves? How can we relate to their pain and suffering in the same way we relate to the suffering of those we love the most in this life? Jesus said it was by first loving God with every part of our being. When we love God with our heart, with our soul, with our mind and with all our strength, we cannot help but love his creation, every single part. We cannot help but feel an ache inside when another one of his children is hurting. God puts his compassion in us.

When you and I feel deeply on behalf of others’ struggles, we are propelled to action. And when we act on behalf of the broken ones in the world, we are part of God’s greater plan in restoring creation from being broken to

being whole. Eternal life, life to the fullest here on earth as well as eternal life after death, is made possible when we no longer follow ourselves, but we follow Christ. He uses us to answer prayers, meet physical needs and provide healing to a broken world in desperate need of our Savior.

I imagine Jesus never escaped the ache, the yearning deep inside. He never had a night of peaceful sleep, or an afternoon of fun not tainted by the yearning of his heart. Every moment of his life was spent having compassion on creation, on you and me. He saw our situation, he felt what we were feeling, and he was propelled to action. His action was the most bold, most loving and most sacrificial action possible. He has provided us healing and hope we never can attain on our own. He is asking us to join him.