

Love Takes A Detour
Luke 10:25-37

SERIES: Faith in Action

Matt Reynolds

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TCUMC – 8:00, 9:15 & 10:30am

I. Intro

This morning we begin our new series and church-wide study called “Faith in Action.” We are going to try to understand more fully how our faith ought to affect all that we do as radiant followers of Christ. We hope to come away from these four weeks with a renewed commitment to truly be the hands of Christ in our world.

How many of you get a little frustrated while driving from time to time? You know I think that driving is one of the times I most consistently sin. I get mad at other drivers who don’t drive exactly how I want them to. Somehow I think people ought to know that when I am driving I own the road. And it is even worse when I am running short on time. It doesn’t even have to be other drivers. Even things like an extra long red light drive me crazy. Oh and how about the train. I think God knew how much I hated to wait in the car and that is why he had me move to a town that is divided by an unavoidable railroad crossing. And what about this...you are driving down the street, running a little late, and then you see

in the middle of your normal route, “Road closed: detour.” How do you feel when you see a detour sign? My reaction definitely is not, “Oh, good! I get to take a detour.” Detours might make us feel frustrated because we are pressed for time and this detour will mess up our schedule. Or we might feel a little anxious because we’re not sure where this detour will take us.

But what if you were driving and saw two road signs—one said “Detour Ahead” but the other said, “Take Your Usual Route.” It was completely your choice. Which would you take? You would probably take your usual route—especially if you knew that the detour would cost you time, money, and personal frustration.

Today we’re going to talk about detours. Not necessarily detours that you might encounter while driving—but we are going to talk about detours when you are traveling the highway of life—life detours. Some detours in life come at you, and you can’t choose to take your normal route—an illness, a layoff from your job, a spouse that walks out of your marriage. I know a lot of people that have had an unexpected detour lately in their careers.

But there are other times in your life when you have a choice to get off your normal path and take a detour—a detour that can help someone. Are you the kind of person who will follow the sign that says “Take Your Usual Route” or “Detour Ahead?”

II. Context and Background

We are going to look at a person in the Bible who decided to take a detour on his road of life. You've probably heard of him. He is known as the "Good Samaritan."

Open your Bibles to Luke 10:25–28. We are going to look at the context of this story. As I read verses 25–28, I want you to notice the motive behind the question that is asked of Jesus.

READ Luke 10:25-28.

In this encounter between Jesus and the law expert, the Bible says that the law expert had an underlying motive. Did you catch the motive behind his question? This guy wanted to test Jesus.

The expert called Jesus "teacher," but he was trying to give the teacher a test. This properly schooled law expert was testing the popular, but unofficial, teacher to see if he could expose to the crowd that Jesus couldn't handle a tough theological question. Jesus didn't go for it though; and since He was a teacher, He gave the test back to the expert.

Jesus asks him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" In other words, Jesus says, you're the expert; don't you know the answer?

The expert can't resist the temptation to show off his theological

sophistication. He answers: “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.”

His answer actually shows a lot of insight. Jesus then reveals his authority over the man by essentially giving him a grade. He says in effect, “You’re right. You get an A+ for that answer.” But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He says “Do this and you will live.”

You see, this man was an expert in knowing, but not in doing. Jesus is saying that it isn’t enough to know the right answer, you must *do it*.

There are many people who are good at talking the talk, but not walking the walk. Recently a Wisconsin newspaper reported that, 29-year-old Johnny Lechner graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater after being a full-time student there for 12 years. Lechner said he would stay longer if he could. “I’m just broke. I’ve got no more money. Trust me, if I had the money, I’d stay longer ... The schedule’s laid back, you’re around all kinds of educated people. And we’re all just broke college kids, too. It’s not like the real world.”

What would you do if Johnny were your son? You’d probably advise him to grow up, join the real world, and contribute to it. But when it comes to Christianity, a lot of people do exactly what Johnny Lechner did. They stay in the safe environment. Do their Bible studies. But they never go out into the real world

and put into practice what they know.

Now let's read verse Luke 10:29. The law expert continues to test Jesus.

READ Luke 10:29.

The law expert's first motive is to "test" Jesus. Here we see his second motive and the scripture even points it out for us. Yes, his motive was to justify himself.

In the Bible the word "justify" normally means to be made right with God. But that's not what it means here. This expert isn't trying to make himself right with Jesus. The word "justify" in this passage means that this man was trying to excuse himself. He was excusing himself from following the command to love his neighbor. He wanted to know how little he could do. He was trying to justify his inaction.

And this is the key to understanding Jesus' response. The problem with the man's question was that he was trying to justify himself from not loving his neighbor, even though he knew it to be the second greatest commandment. Contrary to what most people think, the parable of the "Good Samaritan" isn't just about, "We should help people in need." The parable is also about excuses. It's about self-justification.

This isn't just the law expert's problem. It's our problem too. We often

justify ourselves from not helping others. We tell ourselves that we can't help someone because it's too dangerous, too involved, too time-consuming or we don't have enough money. We all make excuses and we all look for loopholes.

READ Luke 10:30-37.

In this story we have an interesting cast of characters. We have a group of robbers. We have a man who gets robbed and beaten so badly that he is half dead. Then we have the three main characters. The first character is a priest. The office of priest in Israel was of supreme importance and of high rank. They represented the people before God, and offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the law. The second character is a Levite. Levites weren't quite as honored as the priests, but they were nonetheless a privileged group in society, and responsible for the liturgy and protecting the Temple.

So far Jesus has mentioned a priest and a Levite. Who would you expect to be mentioned next? The original hearers would have expected to hear that a Jew came down the road. But the third character is a big surprise. Jesus said a Samaritan came. It's like saying, there's Papa Bear, Mama Bear and a skunk.

Samaritans were despised by Jews. They were considered to be half-breeds and heretics by the Jews. The racial and religious contempt between these two groups was intense and at times even violent.

By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus is pointing out that it doesn't matter what you call yourself or who you are. God isn't interested in titles or worldly esteem. What God desires are people who genuinely demonstrate his love towards other people. The prestigious religious leaders got it all wrong and the despised Samaritan got it all right.

Jesus uses the example of the "Good Samaritan" to show us a person who looked past excuses to stop and help. The Good Samaritan chose to get off his usual route and decided to take a divine detour on his highway of life. Let's look at some of the characteristics of this love detour that the Samaritan took.

III. The Good Samaritan's Example

The Good Samaritan demonstrated love...

1. That Took A Risk

This man was traveling down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and this 17-mile road had a bad reputation. Because of the number of robbers along this road, it was known as "The Way of Blood." This road descends some 3,300 feet through desert and rocky country that could easily hide robbers. The robbers on this road were dangerous. Even if a person didn't have much, they would rob him just for his clothing. That's what happened to this man in the story that Jesus told.

But they didn't just rob him; they beat him, leaving him half dead.

When the Samaritan stopped to help, he knew he was on a dangerous road. He maybe even thought that the robbers might be near and that they might get him next. But the Good Samaritan didn't use risk as a justification not to act.

Sometimes we justify ourselves not helping someone in need because we are afraid of the risk to us. Now, I'll admit there are times when taking a risk just may not be smart. For example, if you are driving through the desert and you see a sign that says, "Don't Pick Up Hitchhikers," then you see a man in an orange jumpsuit with his thumb out, stopping to pick him up isn't just risky, it's dumb.

But most of the time our problem isn't that we take too many risks; *it's that we don't take any risks.* Martin Luther King Jr. Once said, "the first question the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?'" But ... the good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

If you are going to love your neighbor, don't use risks as an excuse to hold back.

Second, the Good Samaritan demonstrated love...

2. That Took Personal Involvement

When the Samaritan sees the wounded man, he doesn't go over to the other side of the road. Instead, he has sincere compassion for him. He bandages up the man's wounds, perhaps using his own head-covering or by tearing strips from his garment. He also pours oil and wine on the wounds. The traveling Samaritan wasn't afraid to get personally involved.

Some people use the excuse of not wanting to get personally involved in helping someone in need. But the Samaritan did not use that excuse. He didn't wait for someone else. He didn't just call 911 or phone the pastor to get involved. He didn't just write a check. He got involved. He was moved with compassion toward action. He got in the ditch with the man. He got close and bandaged the man's wounds. He probably came out of the ditch looking dirty and bloody too.

If you are going to love your neighbor, don't use personal involvement as an excuse to hold back.

The Good Samaritan also demonstrated love...

3. That Took Time

Verse 34 says, "Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him." The Samaritan didn't use a time schedule as an excuse not to help. He took the time to stop, and then he slowed his progress by putting the

man on his donkey. There wasn't an emergency room where the Samaritan could take the man. Instead, he took him to a motel and cared for the man himself that night.

Sometimes we use our schedules to justify not helping people in need. In fact this may be the most common excuse of them all. I cringe when I think about all of the opportunities to serve someone that I have missed simply because I am too busy.

When it comes to helping those in need and loving our neighbors, the greatest ability is availability! If you are going to love your neighbor, don't use time as an excuse to hold back.

Last, the Good Samaritan demonstrated love...

4. That Took Money

Verse 35 says, "The next day he took out two silver coins 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.'"

If you read between the lines, it seems that the Samaritan was a merchant who regularly traveled this road and had stayed at this inn before. He gives the innkeeper money to take care of the man, who stays there awhile. Then he

promises the innkeeper, who apparently knows he can trust the Samaritan, that he will reimburse him for any additional costs when he returns from his trip. The Samaritan didn't use money as an excuse not to act.

Sometimes we justify not helping those in need because it is going to hit our wallet. The Samaritan did not use this as an excuse. He made financial sacrifices to help the man in need. The two silver coins represented two days' wages. Even more, the Samaritan said that he would take care of any extra expenses as well once he returned from his trip.

If you are going to love your neighbor, don't use money as an excuse to hold back. The Good Samaritan demonstrated love that took a risk, personal involvement, time and money. If we want to love others as God has called then we need to love like this.

IV. Conclusion

Look at verses 36-37 again, Jesus asked the expert in verse 36, "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." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Did Jesus answer the question "Who is our neighbor?" Yes, he did. Your neighbor isn't necessarily someone who lives next to you. Your neighbor is anyone

in need, anyone you can help. Your neighbor is all others that God has called us to love.

But notice that Jesus did more than answer that question. In other words, Jesus changed the focus of the question from “Who is my neighbor?” to “What kind of neighbor are you?”

Let me ask you, would you want yourself as a neighbor? If you were the man laying for dead on the road would you want yourself to show up on the scene?

Would you stay on your normal route or would you take a divine detour?

The Good Samaritan disadvantaged himself to advantage someone else. As Christ followers, we have the privilege to disadvantage ourselves to advantage others. Our spiritual journey calls us beyond managing our to-do lists and into a faith in action lifestyle that welcomes divine detours—opportunities to demonstrate God’s love to people in need.

If you don’t hear anything else this morning hear this: **There is no such thing as convenient Christianity!** Think about the disciples who left everything, their careers, their families, their homes, everything, to follow Jesus. God calls us to demonstrate his love to others even when it not convenient! Even when we have to go out of our way. Even when we don’t want to. **True Christ-centered love takes detours to demonstrate God’s love to others.**

Do you remember the old song, *They Will Know We Are Christians By Our*

Love. Jesus' followers are to be identified by love. But how will anyone know our love if we never do anything to show them. Love requires action! Or maybe for people my age you would remember a song by DC Talk. DC Talk was my absolute favorite Christian groups in Jr. High and they did a song called "Luv Is a Verb." I will spare you the rap, although I can do the raps by heart to most DC Talk songs. But they were right...Love Is A Verb! It requires action! It is easy to say we love someone or everyone, but where the rubber meets the road is whether or not we decide to act on that love. Jesus used the Good Samaritan to show us an example of how he desires for us to demonstrate our love for others.

As some of you know...about 3 months ago my life changed dramatically. I became a father. My wife Heidi gave birth to our first child, a son, named Nolan. It has been such an incredible blessing to see him grow over the first few months of life. But one thing I learned really quickly was that whatever still revolved around me at home...it does not any more! In anything where I still felt like the center of attention...I don't now! In an instant I went from being my own person to "Nolan's dad." I don't even get in the door of my mom's house without her saying, "where's Nolan?" Not, "Hi Matt how are you?" Nothing, "Where's Nolan?" My schedule, my priorities, my free time, everything that I thought used to be mine...now belongs to a little baby. And you know what, that is ok. This baby is supposed to interrupt the normal flow of life. How could he not? It is not

about me any longer. Well at some point God wants us to make that transition spiritually too. At some point we need to see the preciousness of the delicate lives around us that need our care and others become the center of our attention. It's not about me and Jesus and that's it any longer. God wants to interrupt our normal routine lives and show us how to love others more than ourselves. And sometimes that means inconvenient things...like waking up at 2 or 3 in the morning!

This week I challenge you to get off your normal beaten path of life. It doesn't have to even be anything big. Visit someone in the hospital. Take a meal to a widow or widower in your neighborhood. Volunteer to baby-sit for a single mom. Write a letter to a soldier overseas. Sponsor a child in an impoverished country.

That is what this series is all about. Faith in Action is not about some cliché campaign where we just say, "Hey everybody let's put our faith in action! Yea!" Faith in Action is about the reality that we have the opportunity to demonstrate God's love for someone else and potentially play a role in God transforming their life. We don't serve others just to serve. We serve out of love for God and to show God's infinite love to those around us.

This week decide to take a divine detour. Put your Faith In Action. Love your neighbor. How will you allow God to use you to demonstrate his love to others this week?