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The Good Neighbor: Leader's Guide

by Ted Cox

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Foreword

This guide and The Good Neighbor short film are available for your use for free. You may make such copies as are necessary to facilitate your discussion group. You may share links with anyone you wish. You may make copies of the film for your friends and neighbors. However, any sale, mass reproduction, editing, or reposting is strictly prohibited.

Introduction

The Good Neighbor is a short film from GemStone Media created for small groups and churches to use as a discussion piece. Because the Good Samaritan text (Luke 10:25-37) is particularly hard to understand from the perspective of our American culture, the film was created in an attempt to help us re-experience the parable in a manner which is closer to the experience Jesus audience would have had in the first century.

Leaders can download a copy of the film along with an updated copy of this guide from our Facebook page:

[Facebook.com/TheGoodNeighborFilm](https://www.facebook.com/TheGoodNeighborFilm)

Or you can also stream the film from vimeo:

vimeo.com/gemstonemedia/thegoodneighbor

As the leader of your group, you have the best understanding of your people and how to work with them. However, I'd like to encourage you not to draw too many conclusions for your group. Give them time to wrestle and draw their own. It will be more meaningful.

The story of the Samaritan in Luke is one which is particularly hard for us to make sense of in 21st Century America for several reasons. First, we have a fundamentally upside down view of the characters. Throughout the New Testament, the religious elite are at odds with Jesus. Naturally, we assume the priest will be the villain, and the levite not much better. However, to Jesus's audience, and in particular to the lawyer he was addressing, the priest is the most natural and logical hero. Conversely, while the first century Jew saw a Samaritan as an enemy, our entire understanding of the word Samaritan comes from this passage of scripture. We have "Good Samaritan" laws, and colloquially, Samaritan means someone who helps. Second, we only hear what is written in the story, and so we miss a wealth of information that would have been understood by Jesus audience. In combination, a story which was both shocking and incredibly challenging to its original audience seems simple and ordinary to us. That very banality makes it hard for us to let the story work on us and change us.

This is particularly sad, because the Good Samaritan is probably the best known parable

of Christ after the Prodigal Son, and much like the Prodigal's father, the Samaritan is a powerful type of Christ, coming to save the broken man when all hope is lost, and willing to pay the ultimate price.

That's the goal behind the Good Neighbor project. We're hoping this will help you and the members of your small group experience the parable again with fresh eyes, and see the powerful challenge Christ is laying before us.

Thank you so much for taking the time to look at this material. If it's helpful to you, please like us on facebook and vimeo and share the information with your online friends. If you have comments or feedback, we'd love to hear it. Leave your comments on our facebook or vimeo page, or send us an email at gemstone@gemission.org with subject line: The Good Neighbor Feedback.

Stumbling Blocks

At the time of this writing, the film has been shown and used in a number of different discussion group environments. Generally, the film has been well received, and people have been challenged by it. However, we've discovered some common stumbling blocks you may want to address with your group, or at least be familiar with in case they come up.

Why don't the pastor and the Mom call 9-1-1 once they get back into cell range?

Locals in the part of Colorado where we shot the road scenes tell us that 9-1-1 responders arrive approximately 1.5 hours after a call is made. With a head wound of the severity seen in the film, this is simply too long to wait. Further, there's nothing to indicate in the film that they don't call once they reach cell range. All we know is that they don't stop and the muslim man, Tarik, arrives before first responders.

This situation seems much more extreme than what we usually experience.

Certainly, for most people, the needy we are confronted with are not in immediate life or death peril. However, we often don't truly know their circumstances. Our ability to evaluate their level of need in a meaningful way is usually very limited. On the other hand, while the characters in the film face significant risk for stopping to help, our risk is usually comparatively low. Often, we can make a difference in someone's life with minimal effort, and very limited cost.

The pastor has an awfully good reason not to stop, but no reason is given in the scripture passage for the priest to pass by on the other side.

This is part of the purpose of the film. Jesus's first century audience would have understood a number of things about the life of the priest that we miss. For example, the priest probably couldn't tell if the man was alive or dead. Should he stop, and the man is dead, he would become ceremonially unclean and thus unable to perform his duties at the temple until he could be cleansed. The process is detailed in the old testament but it's extensive. This wasn't purely an inconvenience for the priest either. Part of the duties he would have been unable to perform would be caring and providing for the poor. So the priest had a reason not to stop, and it was not entirely selfish. The real question we should be asking is: was the priest's reason good enough?

The Samaritan stops at an inn, cares for the injured man over night and then has a conversation with the innkeeper saying he's going to come back. So he can't have been in peril for himself.

This is another area where our cultural view is deceptive. The best succinct explanation of this can be found in Dr. Kenneth Bailey's excellent *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*.¹ In short, we don't understand the innkeeper or how a samaritan would have been received in Jericho. But to put this in our modern context, imagine stopping at a cheap motel operated by the mafia, bringing with you an important member of the local crime family who had nearly been beaten to death. Then imagine that for whatever reason, you appear to be a member of a rival crime family. While the fellow running the motel might not be prepared to take action against you himself, that's no guarantee there wouldn't be thugs waiting for you when you walked out the front door. While that's an imprecise analogy, it's far closer to the reality than our assumption of the benevolent innkeeper/doctor figure.

Discussion Questions

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was certainly a dangerous road, and one locals would have known was often troubled with robbers. However, some believe that Jesus chose this road for another purpose. Jerusalem was the holy city. Conversely Jericho was a place often associated with idolatry. So, in a sense, the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho was turning away from holiness and moving toward idolatry. While this interpretation is not founded in deep scholarship, it does raise interesting questions about whether or not the man who was robbed was a good man or not.

Did the injured man deserve help? Does it matter?

There is some additional explanation in the Stumbling blocks section above, but it's very likely that members of Jesus audience would have known a priest and a levite fairly well.

Further they would have intuitively understood why the priest and the levite might have chosen

to pass by. One scholar suggests that the Levite might have seen the priest pass by and simply followed his example. Regardless of their reasons, there is no question they justified their choice in some way.

The pastor and the mother both had reasons not to stop and help the injured man. What did you think of their reasons? Were they good enough? Why or why not?

Our goal with the film was to create justifications that the audience member would have to wrestle with some. On film, it's easy to say that "late for a meeting" isn't a valid excuse not to stop -- in spite of it being one of the most common reasons we don't help the people we run across.

Think of a time when you did not help someone. (This doesn't have to be a stranger you passed on the road, it could be a friend who asked you to help them move, or a family member looking for someone to talk to, the scenario is not critical to the discussion) What was your reason? Was it good enough?

Answers here will often be situational. Challenge your group members. Try to find where they are drawing lines between when it's okay to not help, and when it isn't.

What were some reasons for Tarik not to help the injured man?

You're group will likely hit on these, but here are some answers to look for:

- It isn't safe.
- He can't speak the language.
- People might misunderstand his intentions.
- The injured man could die in spite of, or even because of his attempts to help.

What does Tarik sacrifice to help the injured man? Would you be willing to make those sacrifices for a stranger? Why? Why not?

Hopefully your group will see some significant and hard sacrifices that Tarik made.

Some answers to look for:

Job - Tarik, already not in a good place with his Boss ("He will ruin everything."), chooses not to make his delivery on time, and further to destroy the merchandise he is transporting in order to help the injured man. It's extremely unlikely he will keep his job. He's giving up his livelihood.

Safety - Tarik, who struggles to communicate, is comparatively very safe in his van. Once out on the road with the injured man, he gives up that security in order to help.

Freedom - In the end, Tarik faces possible criminal charges for trying to help. The only

witness who could clear him, may or may not ever have any recollection of the events.

Often times, fear is a big motivator in our choice not to stop. We're afraid to be attacked, to be taken advantage of by someone who doesn't really need help, or simply afraid that we will be negatively impacted by stopping to help (late, tired, etc).

What are we afraid to risk or lose? Is the greater risk in stopping to help, or in driving by?

What are some common scenarios in which I could show compassion?

We aren't all confronted by a bloody man on the side of the road. However, we all are faced with opportunities to help people in need. Evaluate your life in the context of Christ's remarks while separating the sheep and the goats.

Where can you take action for "the least of these?"

Matthew 25:34-40 (NIV)

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Some people have expressed that they would undoubtedly stop for a man bleeding on the side of the road, but their day to day experience doesn't demand the same level of response.

Others have expressed the opposite sentiment that a man bleeding on the road in an area infested with criminals is simply too dangerous, but they would help under less dangerous circumstances.

What do you think is Christ's standard for when to help? How different is your standard from the standard of Jesus? Are there tangible, immediate steps you can take to close that gap?

"...the Jews looked at the Samaritans as racial inferiors and heretics."

Dr. Timothy Keller - 08202012 ECO/Fellowship Summer Gathering Keynote

John 4:9 "Jews do not associate with Samaritans."

Why do you think Jesus chose a Samaritan instead of a gentile or some other less controversial outsider?

Usually people will engage seriously with this question. However, sometimes you will

get a very quick pat answer here. Some challenges to throw at your group. If Jesus just wanted an enemy, why not a Roman? If he just wanted an outsider, why not a Greek, Ethiopian or Egyptian? The Samaritan is unique in several key ways. He was a nationally offensive. The Jews of the Northern Kingdom were dispersed and replaced with Samaritans at a time of colossal military defeat. He was religiously offensive. The Samaritans claimed to follow the Jewish religion, but had a different temple -- they were heretics. Further there had been regular and openly violent conflict between the Israelites and the Samaritans for the preceding hundred years, including attempts to destroy one another's temples.

Who are the outcasts and outsiders in our culture today?

Clarify for your group that we're talking about who they consider outsiders. Not who the broader culture considers to be outsiders. Some common responses here are homosexuals, street people, the disabled, atheists, people of opposing political parties, etc.

Sometimes people are openly hostile to Christians or Christianity. Based on Jesus' attitude, how should we treat them? Does their response matter?

Often we justify not reaching out to people because they will respond with anger or vitriol. However, the Samaritan teaches us that there is no risk too great when helping others.

What do you think Jesus is saying about how we should live?

Hopefully, at some point the discussion has turned toward the idea that we are all in God's hands. Our safety, pride, money, etc are all his to command. If we trust him, then there is no price too high because we know he will redeem our sacrifice.

Miracles

At the premiere, I was asked to explain "what a film like this costs." My rough estimate would be about \$70,000. I don't really know, though, because this film was made in an entirely unconventional way. God asked me to make it, and so I stepped forward in faith. In the end, the film cost \$650 to make, because no one who worked on it got paid anything, all the equipment, food and supplies were donated, and everyone covered their own expenses. Even our legal work was handled Pro Bono. In fact, God intervened countless times in the production of the film. Here are just a few of the miracles that occurred during production of the film.

The day we shot the news cast, it was just my son, Isaac, and I along with our actress, Shawna Cauthen. She was a great sport about everything, but the wind was fierce and it was bitter cold. In fact, it was so cold that after we wrapped and got back into the car my son told me I was crying. I glanced in the mirror. Sure enough, there were tears running down my cheeks, but I couldn't feel them because the wind had been so icy cold. We had done our best to try to block

the wind, but it was simply too strong. Everything we used just got caught in it, like a sail. So, I dismissed everyone and headed home thinking that our footage was probably ruined. Even with the mic close to her mouth, the wind was almost certain to be louder than she was.

When I got the footage loaded onto my edit system, I discovered that I'd been correct. The wind completely obliterated the dialog. Wind is particularly hard to remove after the fact because it changes frequencies, and is fairly close to the human voice, meaning that if you remove the wind, you've usually also removed the dialog. However, in this case I was able to pull the wind out, and leave the dialog intact, and it only took a few minutes. I haven't done a study, but I think the likelihood of that is astronomically small.

Writing the script, it was simple to imagine our man who is beaten and robbed zipping around in a nice BMW. I wasn't stuck on a BMW, though. Anything that said "steal me" would work. So I talked with everyone I could think of as I hunted for the right car. Initially, things went smoothly. I spoke with a friend who agreed to loan us his BMW. Perfect. However, it had a roof rack that couldn't be removed. Everyone in the crew agreed the roof rack had a significant negative effect on the sexy "steal me" response, and so I went hunting for a different car. In the end, I wound up making cold calls to friends of friends asking to borrow their porches. That wasn't awkward at all. All of it was to no avail. Someone would offer a car but it wouldn't be available when we needed to shoot, or we could come film it in their driveway, but we couldn't drive it, or some other show stopping caveat. We were a week into shooting, days from when I absolutely had to have the car when another friend called me and asked if there was anything he

could do to help with the film. I teasingly asked if he had a sports car laying around. He responded by telling me his shop had just picked up an AC Cobra. Not only were they willing to let us drive it, and work with our schedule, they trucked it out onto the eastern plains for us, and worked the whole night on the crew!

Aside from the sports car, probably the biggest struggle we had was finding the hospital location. Initially it looked as though it would be the easiest. We had several medical consultants on the script, all of whom thought they could find us a location, and my producer was working part time at a hospital that had an entire wing sitting empty. However, time marched on. We kept delaying the hospital shoot because we didn't have a location. At one point I tried going door to door at various urgent cares. No luck. My last ditch effort was to call Dr. Greg Sharp, who had been trying to find us a location, and ask if we could use his practice. I was confident he would say yes, but his practice was in Woodland Park, and many of the cast and crew were driving from Denver. I'd been trying to avoid the extra travel. So I called Greg. We chatted briefly, and before I could get to my question, he asked me if we could use his practice. I told him I was thinking the same thing but had been avoiding it because of the drive and he told me, "We just relocated to Manitou." That saved about 30 minutes of driving for everyone, but it proved to be so much more valuable than that. Greg was able to get us the portable heart monitor from the Manitou Fire Department, and he lined up our police officer from the Manitou Police Department (Colorado Springs had already said no in spite of our having CSPD officers ready and willing to be involved). In the end, Greg even rigged up a phony blood transfusion (visible in the last shot of our injured man) and became the hand of

Roger being held by pastor Larry in the hospital. He was of invaluable assistance, and being at his place brought together a ton of pieces we needed.

The casting credit at the end of the film went to Emory John Collinson, David Corder, and Ralph Giordano. Emory and David are old friends of mine from my acting days, so when I went to cast the film, I contacted them and asked if they could invite any actors they knew in town to the auditions. Ralph is a film director I worked with more than a decade ago when I was first starting out in the video business. I touched base with Ralph because he had, at one point, been the president of the Colorado Springs Film Council. The Council had ceased to exist many years ago, but I thought he might still be able to point me in the right direction for permits and such. He came to an initial read-through I put together of an early draft of the script, long before casting occurred, and was interested in the production. All that to say, my connection to each of these three guys was in the distant past, and while I was hopeful they could help me out, it was a long shot.

In addition to word of mouth, I created casting notices for Facebook and on the Colorado Actors Scripts and Film board. We had about 34 actors turn out to audition for the film. Just for clarity here, Colorado Springs is not renowned for its indie film industry, or even its live theater. This is a tech town, with a minor in Christian Ministries. Our art world here is small and anemic. But 34 people came out, and many of them were very talented. A lot of actors came down from Denver. It was an amazing turn out.

Over the course of production, I talked with most of the actors about how they had come to hear about the film and audition. Nearly all of them had heard about the film from Emory, David or Ralph, and most of them had heard about it from at least two of those fine men independently.

That in and of itself is amazing. However, these actors weren't simply young actors looking for their start. Most of them were very experienced, seasoned actors -- at least one of whom were actually making a living acting -- who did our film for free, and helped out on set when they weren't acting.

The final few shots take place in a church. Monument Community Presbyterian Church in Monument, Colorado, graciously agreed to not only make their facility available, but invite their congregation to stay after a service to fill up the pews for us. In addition, we sent out a Facebook invitation to about 400 people to come and be a part of the event. I arrived in time for the service at MCPC and Pastor Dave had me stand up and talk a little bit about the film and our shooting schedule for that afternoon. Setting up a film set takes time, and so, though the service was over at 11am, we weren't actually going to start shooting until 1pm. So I was suggesting people go out to lunch and then come back for the shoot.

We started setting up, and our first shot was going to be the wide shot you see when the church is first revealed. We put the camera in the back with a zoom lens on it, because we didn't know what kind of crowd we would get. We wanted to be able to adjust so that we could make

the room look full. Only 6 people had responded to our FB invite that they were coming. My email invitations had yielded a lot of polite declines. We were really counting on the people at MCPC to come and fill up the pews for us. About 10 minutes to 1, we had perhaps 10 people who had showed up, not nearly enough to make much of anything, and the MCPC elders were telling me that most of the church was on vacation, I'd picked a bad Sunday and I should really come back next week. Here I had an actor who had driven nearly an hour to be there and was volunteering his time, my whole crew, we'd spent nearly two hours setting up -- I couldn't just come back next week.

We zoomed the camera all the way in, and started planning how we would fill the shot with the people we had. A few people here and there continued to trickle in, and a few minutes after one, I went up to the front of the church, explained the plan, and started moving people into roughly the shape I thought we needed in the pews. When I was done, I walked back to peek through the camera and see how things looked. The shot was totally full. Slowly I zoomed out. All the way out. The shot was full. I looked back up at the room. For a moment, I just compared what I was seeing in camera to the room. The shot you see in the film literally shows every single person who was in that room. The people on the edges are the last people in the rows. God provided the perfect number of people to fill our shot.

Part of our plan for the eastern plains shooting was to use some large lights running on a generator. Our first night of shooting we ran into two critical problems with this plan. The first was that the large lights simply weren't large enough. We could cover a small area with light, but

we couldn't possibly spill enough light into the background to make it feel like moonlight. The second was that our generator kept turning on and off like a Christmas tree, and the flickering would blow our light bulbs.

In the end, we shot all three nights using cheap \$20 LED lights running on AA batteries. Now, don't get me wrong, I love those LED lights. They're great. I use them all the time in production to create highlights in people's eyes, or a very small fill. However, they are not sufficient to light an entire scene in the pitch dark. Even a scene that's supposed to be dark. Remember, I told you above our 1000 watt lights on the generator weren't really enough. Somehow, though, those \$20 LEDs created the light we needed.

The amazing Heath Heine had the toughest role in the entire film. He spent a good portion of the shooting schedule in bloody makeup and just a pair of boxer shorts. That doesn't seem so bad, until you've been out on the eastern plains of Colorado after midnight in April. It's cold. Freezing cold. The rest of us were in heavy sweaters with heavy coats over them with hats and gloves and scarves on. It's that cold. Then he had to lay on the ground. It was even colder down there. I know. I stood in for him a few times. And even with my coat and hat and gloves it was cold down there on the ground.

What we asked him to do out there was miserable. I haven't told you about the wind yet. One of the problems with the eastern plains -- aside from it being a desert where the temperature plummets as the sun goes down -- is that there is a horrible icy wind, that cuts through

everything. And there are almost no trees or anything out there to break it up. It's strong, brutal, and it takes an already freezing environment and makes it really awful. It also over powered all our wind screens and crushed our audio. Making it impossible to record sound when the wind was going.

We had to shoot three nights on the eastern plains with poor Heath in his boxers. I tried to line up an RV for him to hang out in when he wasn't needed on set, but all the leads fell through, and in the end, he wound up just sitting in his car with the heater on. Most of the scenes didn't need dialog -- Praise the Lord! -- But we did need to record sound for the car jacking scene.

All three nights, we setup in the freezing cold, with the icy wind blasting us. All three nights, just as we were wrapping up our preparations, the wind died down. All three nights, as we were wrapping up shooting, the wind came back. The first night, I didn't really notice. The second night, I thought it was really strange. The third night, I didn't realize we were finished until I felt the wind come up again.

We could not have done the shoot with the wind. So God, in his infinite mercy, took it away for exactly the time we needed three nights in a row.

Closing

I hope the film and this guide have been helpful to you and your group. The Good Samaritan is a fascinating study. An area of note that we don't enter deeply into here, but may be a valuable follow on study is how Jesus interacts with the lawyer and the juxtaposition of his question with Christ's answer. The lawyer asks "Who is my neighbor?" The answer we would expect from Christ would be a story about a Jew helping a Samaritan, as if to say even the Samaritan is your neighbor. But Christ goes a step further, making the Samaritan the hero -- the one who rescues. This serves to further emphasize the type of Christ in the Samaritan. Christ, like the Samaritan, was an outcast and a heretic to the religious establishment.

May God bless you as you go forth and do likewise.

Ted Cox

GemStone Media

1. http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Through-Middle-Eastern-Eyes/dp/0830825681/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1372887812&sr=1-1