

Graceland
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"But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of ... is a land of the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it... (Deuteronomy 11:11-12)

Words from the Editor:

Love is one of God's unifying themes; beyond its cruciality for our salvation, we are built to love God and love others, and further called to be His representatives in our interactions with others. Therefore, we must become good neighbors. A good neighbor can be many things to many people: a steward of their talents in servitude of others, a caring listener, any observant Christian who fills a gap to help others — and always a missionary. Especially in this season, our world needs love and compassion. In this issue, brothers and sisters share the impact of being and meeting good neighbors, all for God's glory.



Good Neighbors

To Whom am I the Good Neighbor?

**By Pastor Donald Liu,
Central Campus Advisory Pastor**

We spend our life in pursuit of perfect things: a perfect job, perfect spouse, perfect living environment, even a perfect church and fellowship. Yet, most of the time, the result of our search is disappointing! However, have we ever considered that why we can't find that perfect thing is because of ourselves?

One person came to a town's gas station. After filling up his gas, he asked the cashier, "I just accepted a job here. I've never been in this neighborhood before, how are the people here?" The cashier asked, "How are the people in your current neighborhood?" "Not so good!" he replied. "They're pretty rude. No manners!" The cashier shook his head and said, "I think you'll discover the people here are quite similar." At that very moment, another car pulled in and the driver came in and asked, "Hey! I just moved here. What do you think of the people here?" The cashier asked the same question: "How are the people from your previous neighborhood?" The second customer said,



“They’re amazing! They’re all very friendly. It was hard for us to move.” Then the cashier replied, “You’ll find that the people here are quite similar too!”

We are looking for a good spouse, but are we a good spouse? We are looking for good colleagues, but are we good colleagues to others? We are looking for good neighbors, so then please let us first become the

good neighbor! Our church is resuming in person gatherings; our hearts must resume first. Let’s look at the scripture from Luke 10:25-37.

A. How do we inherit eternal life?

This expert in the law asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus did not answer his question directly, but asked, “What is written in the Law?” He answered, “‘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.’”

This expert is very familiar with the Bible. He knows that the entire law can be summarized by two things: “love God” and “love people.” The cross is made of two wooden logs. The vertical one represents the relationship between God and us, and the horizontal one represents the relationship among us people. With respect to our relationship with God, this expert quoted Deuteronomy: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength! (Deut 6:5) This is the perfect answer! Then what about the other aspect that deals with human relationships? “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus said, “You have answered correctly, do this and you will live.” At first glance, Jesus seems to say that people can inherit eternal life through abiding by the law. However, if you really think about it carefully, these two commands are not about doing, but being. This is about the relationship of a man with God and a man with others. I recently pondered this question: what is the true and eternal value system? We are not talking about whether you can have eternal life by doing this for God and doing that for others. This is not the truth inscribed in the Bible! What the Bible says is that you should love God and love people! Loving God grants us eternal life, and loving people yields us the abundance of life in eternity.

Perhaps you will say, “I love God, but I am not ready to love people! If I do it with reluctance, it will not be powerful, so I’d rather not do it!” However, I have to say to



you: sorry, loving your neighbor is not an option you can choose. Jesus didn’t say that you only need to love God, and if you have leftover energy, then love some people! There is this western saying: “You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving!” If you don’t have the heart to love neighbors, then your love for God has some problems! If we want to enjoy abundance in life, we must love God and love our neighbors; it must be both!

B. The transition of the center – from self to others

If that expert in law stopped right there, we would not have known what really was brewing in his mind. However, he continued, hoping to justify himself, “And who is my neighbor?” He seemed to say this: when you talk about a relationship with God, no one is better than us, who abide by the law! Now, tell me, who is my neighbor, so that I can go love him! Jesus, again, didn’t answer directly, but told a story. He said that a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way, he was beaten half to death by robbers! A priest went by and didn’t stop; a Levite passed by and didn’t stop either; when a Samaritan passed by, he had compassion and helped that person. Jesus asked, “Who is the neighbor to the person who is in need?” The expert in the law replied that it was the one who had mercy on him. Who is my neighbor, then? In the times of Jesus, Samaritans were not regarded highly by the Jews. So, Jesus intentionally tells the story of a Samaritan, who would generally be looked down on by the expert in the law. The law expert asked, “Who is my neighbor?” but Jesus asked, “To whom am I neighbor with?” Is there a fundamental difference between the two? Some people would say, “Come on! Donald! Aren’t they the same? If someone is my neighbor, then I am his neighbor! What’s so different about it?” It is absolutely different! The “neighbor” in “Who is my neighbor?” is a self-centered circle. No matter how big the circle is, it’s still a closed circle, with the self in the center; whereas when Jesus asked, “To whom am I neighbor with?”, it’s a question of whether or not I’m willing to be a neighbor to those who are in need. It is open and centered towards others.



This all sounds vague, so let me try to explain it with a metaphor. When I define a scope, for example, the ones sitting at the first and second rows are my neighbors, it means that everyone else is not my neighbor. When the people sitting in the third row are in need, I can just lay back and chill. "Sorry, I really feel for you, but you are not my neighbor." And then I can go rest peacefully! If someone who is very generous says that everyone from the first row to the fifth row are their neighbors, but the person at the sixth row needs help, what should they do? "To whom am I neighbor with" is a completely different mindset. Today if a brother or sister who sits farther away needs help, what I think about is not if he or she is within my "neighbor scope," but if he or she really needs some help. If the answer is "yes," I am his or her neighbor. This is a thought initiated from others' needs, and a mindset initiated with love! Today, a lot of



problems stem from the thought of "who are my neighbors?" This self-centered attitude has many different manifestations in life. In general, if we ask, "who is my neighbor?" we will end up crashing into walls.

For example, if this is manifested at home, it will be like, "Please list out all the chores I need to do, and I won't touch anything else! Alas! I go to work and earn a living, certainly, cooking, washing, and caring for kids is your job! Ah! I have already washed the dishes, which is way better than someone who doesn't. You still want me to vacuum? No way!" Do you think such a family life will bring happiness? At work, if you care about every tiny thing you do or not, you probably won't have a good relationship with your coworkers. At church, if you just do what you should do, you probably won't grow spiritually. In the realm of social care, it is displayed as a what-has-that-to-do-with-me indifference! I don't mean that in everything we do, we show this mentality, but I ask God to enlighten us to see and stay away from this self-limiting mentality.

On the other hand, usually among sisters, we encounter the other extreme, where we are too sensitive to our conscience. We feel obligated to respond in the way we are expected to. When people ask for help, don't just drop right in with haste because the Bible says we need to love neighbors and pastors tell us to help those in need. Yes, that's correct, the Bible says we need to love neighbors, those who are truly in need. However, not all people who seek help really are in need; moreover, the way they expect us to help might not be the right way. To discern whether others are in need or not, and find the best way to help them, we all need wisdom from God! ◆

A Few Ways to Be a Good Neighbor

By Paul Ling, Main Campus



Pastor Donald explained this very well: “You cannot inherit eternal life through doing. Instead, what’s said here is that you shall love God and people. Loving God grants us eternal life, and loving people yields us the abundance of life in eternity!” “You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving!”

Loving our neighbors is not for our benefit, but simply to honestly love people.

I joined ElderHelp in September 2019. My main responsibility was to assist physically weak seniors. After the background check and training, I chose to visit a senior named John every other week. He is an 85-year-old retired businessman, and his wife has passed away. Although he has been paralyzed and bedridden, his mind is clear, and he communicates well. My responsibility is to chat with him and read the Wall Street Journal to him for an hour. To serve in such a close relationship allows me to feel the life in people. This is quite different from packing up food at a food bank for those people you rarely have a chance to meet or just driving people around to grocery shop. Despite there being less communication, those serving opportunities are still rewarding.

It reminds me of my time in Ohio, where I visited nursing homes every week. When we visit more often, our communication gets deeper; the love and care I offered was not in vain. There are similar nursing homes in San Diego where we can serve.



When the pandemic situation improved, I resumed my volunteer work at ElderHelp. So far it has been limited to delivering food and medicine, which are contactless services. One time when I was delivering a medical shot to a service dog, the owner came out to welcome me and showed me her two service dogs, one old and one little. The older dog has retired, but she will keep her to the end. I asked her when the older one retired. She explained that it’s the service dog’s duty to follow and take care of the owner and remind

the owner to sleep at night. When the time comes and the dog knows that they can't fulfil their role, they stop following the owner; then the dog retires.

I have retired from my career life, but our lives should not ever retire. I hope I will keep this once-a-week service routine. After so many years, it has become part of my life.

If you are interested in these three volunteer opportunities, you can search online or email me at tenor40809@gmail.com.

- ◆ ElderHelp of San Diego
- ◆ 養老院探視 Ombudsman Volunteer - County of San Diego
- ◆ San Diego Food Bank ◆

A Good Neighbor

**-Interview with Cathy Li
Interviewed by Emily Xu**



Pastor Donald's sermon on being a good neighbor is a timely reminder to us that instead of making an effort to pursue a perfect other, we should become a good neighbor ourselves. It reminds me of a sister who came to our church through Happiness Group, Cathy Li. We have known each other for almost ten years since my daughter and I started learning Gu Zheng with her. She was born into a musical family and is good at many different instruments. Her husband is also a versatile musician. At the beginning of the year, I learned that she had gotten baptized online. I was elated and couldn't wait for the pandemic to pass so we could catch up. I got another text from her in July, saying that she was planning to open a Zoom adult group piano class as part of giving back to the community. Naturally, I joined the class immediately, and couldn't help recommending it to other friends. But after the ecstasy and excitement of learning piano, I couldn't help but wonder why Cathy wanted to do it in the first place? Where did the idea sprout from? Therefore, we interviewed her.

Q: Could you please give us a brief walkthrough as to how you came into our church Happiness Group and further made your conviction and became a Christian?

A: In September 2019, Sister Karen invited me to a gathering at the park, and I soon joined the 8-week Happiness Group program. At the end of December 2020, I was baptized on Zoom and became a Christian.

Q: You have quite a busy schedule with your regular private lessons daily, so how did you come up with this idea of holding an adult group piano class?



A: After my baptism, I joined a Bible study group. In this group there were many talented sisters who shared their skills after the Bible study. They taught me how to bake a cake, how to do cross stitching, and how to understand the nutrition label on food packages. I learned so much from them and started wondering what I could share. It just occurred to me that maybe I could teach piano online. I thought about some of my friends, who had a dream to learn piano since they were little but didn't have the opportunity. I also have some friends who are empty nesters. The piano at their house became a decoration after their kids went to colleges. I thought I could definitely provide a piano lesson once a week online. After all, we only need to spend a little time each day practicing, so learning a new instrument wouldn't be too hard. You never know, it might become a way of communicating with your kids or even grandkids! Also, learning a new instrument is scientifically proven to be good for human brains, and it boosts our confidence. So, the adult piano class was born.



Speaking of which, I heard a story from one of my adult students. Her 10-year-old son recently was away at a camp for two weeks. When he returned and resumed his piano practice, it was a very frustrating experience. He even started banging on the piano.

This mom couldn't convince him, so she just sat down at the piano and started practicing the most basic homework I gave her. Surprisingly, the son didn't leave but quietly watched. After, he hugged the mom from behind and told her that she was so great and patient, practicing repetitively,

never losing her temper on the piano. I was very touched by that story.

Q: It has been almost two months now, how are the students doing? Are there any improvements you see in your students? Do you find it as satisfying to teach adult students?

A: Most of our students have no piano background. I didn't want to pressure the students too much. We started with the correct pose and learning how to read musical scores. I hope they are learning correctly, even if it is slow. There are quite a few differences in teaching adult students. Adult learners have more comprehensive understanding and are more serious in learning; they think actively and ask many questions; they also are more diligent in practicing regularly. When asked why they were learning piano, many students said that they wanted it to help with their brain health. We are happy that we can provide such an opportunity to many people in the community!

Q: Pastor Donald from Central Campus had an article about Christians being good neighbors. Do you have anything particular that you would like to share?

A: Not really. My original thinking was quite simple. I just thought to myself, "What talent do I have? And what can I do to help others?" Then we just start doing it. That's all.

As a beneficiary of this program, I often was deeply touched by Ms. Cathy's serious attitude towards teaching. Online group lessons were a challenge because of technology, so she upgraded her internet service and updated hardware so that the class would run smoothly. Even beyond the set class time, she constantly reminds her students about the pitfalls of beginners while practicing. She even made special video clips to explain how to relax different parts of the body to achieve the right pose for playing piano. It all starts from a heart of asking "what can I do to help others?" I hope God will help every one of us to reflect on what we can do to become a good neighbor. ◆





Love – A Testimony on the Love of God

By Wendy Weng, FengYan Tang

Greetings, brothers and sisters! My name is Wendy. I am from Fujian and have been in the U.S. for 20 years. When I was only 8 months old, my mother died of cerebral hemorrhage, leaving behind myself, two older brothers, and one older sister who were 7, 5, and 2 at the time. For years, my father lived far away, struggling to make a living and unable to take care of us; therefore, we were left in the care of our grandma who was already over 70 and blind. Because we were in extreme poverty, the adults in the family decided to give me away as a baby bride. It so happened that when the matchmaker came to fetch me, I wouldn't stop crying and she was so fed up that she refused to take me. To make matters worse, I was born with very poor health and became so burdensome that the adults left me at the foot of a hill to die. My oldest brother came to my rescue and carried me home when he heard my cries. And all of that happened before I even turned one.

I hardly know how I managed to grow up. As far as I can remember, I never once felt loved. I was so jealous of the kids that were showered in their mothers' love. At mealtimes, their moms would search high and low to fetch them; we never had a taste of that persistent love. We were so poor that none of my siblings went to school except me. From a very young age, my siblings had to work in the fields to provide for the family. I was the only one who graduated from middle school. Because I lost my mom when I was very little, I was very quiet but filled with bitterness. I would privately cry at the slightest hardship; I thought about committing suicide all the time and would dream about my mom almost every night. When I sat for the high school exam in 1987, I was accepted by a vocational school but rejected later due to my poor eyesight.



Luckily, a different school accepted me. My entire family managed to scrape together 30 RMB, just enough to cover my tuition. But when I was told to pay an additional 50 RMB the next day for the uniform and other supplies, I had to quit as I simply



couldn't afford it. I dropped out of school before school even started. I left the school discreetly for fear of open humiliation. No one cared to ask me why I returned home and all I could do was cry alone in my room. I hated those who did not give me a helping hand and I hated my dad for his indifference and inability to provide for my education. I wanted to die. At 17, I hated my hometown so much that I boarded a train to find work at a construction site in a distant city. Yet when I got there, I became so fearful of the people that I left abruptly after only two days, not daring to ask for pay. A fellow countryman sent me home. I returned to Fuzhou after an exhausting 10-hour train ride with an empty stomach. No one ever empathized with me or cared about me. I didn't like to pour my heart out to others either. My life was full of struggle and hardship, yet my craving for love and attention grew by the day.



Then I got married. To better provide for us, my husband left me and our three-year-old son and came to the U.S. A few years later, we followed suit. Both my husband and I worked hard to make a living and pay off

our debt. Our lives have indeed improved for the better and I have also become happier. After my arrival in the U.S., I realized that people (other than my husband) actually cared about me. Some patrons at my workplace would bring small gifts to me from time to time. As I had never been given gifts of any kind in my whole life, I was filled with gratefulness at these kind gestures. One day, my husband took me to a fellowship gathering at Dr. Mai's house. Dr. Mai and her husband were both very joyful. They prepared my favorite foods, and I was deeply touched as that was the first time, I received such hospitality. Time and time again, I attended the fellowship. Time and time again, I was filled with joy that I

simply didn't know how to describe. My heart was deeply touched by the lyrics in the worship songs, and I was warmed by the love and attention I was given. Brothers and sisters in the fellowship would take turns checking on me and taking me out. They also shared the gospels with me and taught me to read the Bible. They taught me not to complain nor to hate but instead to love others like Jesus did. They not only nurtured me spiritually but also provided a lot of tangible help in my life. When I got injured at work, Dr. Mai treated me for free. Her love for me was unparalleled to anything I had experienced before. The more I was with them, the more I liked them. Little by little, my heart was softened, and I began to lose my lifelong sense of inferiority.

After that, I committed my life to Jesus and was baptized. Praise the Lord! I started reading the Bible and learning about God's Word. When I came across Mat-

thew 19:19, "Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself," my heart was opened. I no longer felt hatred and resentment towards my father. I learned to forgive those whom I used to hate and instead to love and care about them. Praise the Lord who renewed my life! I will follow Him the rest of my life since I know He is my strength and my fortress. The dark life I had endured without the light of love is long gone; my life now is overflowing with love. I have a grandson and a granddaughter. Both my son and daughter-in-law love the Lord and love me. The Lord has provided for me abundantly and I have not forgotten His new commandment for me in John 13:34-35: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Brothers and sisters, let's love one another, help one another, and remember to share the love and joy we received from the Lord. Hallelujah! ◆



LOVE ONE ANOTHER
as I have loved you.

A Fable: A Question from Little Jack

By Michael Hsu, Main Campus



Little Jack is an elementary school student. He lives in the suburbs of a big city with his dad Tom. Tom is a very devoted Christian. He attends the church service with Jack every Sunday. This past Sunday, the kindly old pastor talked about the importance of sharing Christ and encouraged all Christians to fulfill the Great Commission that our Lord Jesus entrusted to us -- spreading the gospel and making disciples of all the nations. Jack saw his dad nodding his head earnestly as he listened to the pastor's sermon.

Little Jack and his dad returned home after the Sunday service. Uncle Jimmy came to visit at night. He was an old friend of dad and a nonbeliever. Jack asked his dad after Uncle Jimmy had left, "Dad, why did you never share the gospel with Uncle Jimmy? Isn't that what the sermon today was all about?"

Tom was noticeably uneasy upon hearing Jack's question. He hesitantly said, "I suppose... Uncle Jimmy has no interest in things like that and I don't want it to get in the way of our friendship. And... I think it's the pastors' job... to spread the gospel." Little Jack was very disappointed at his dad's answer and quietly returned to his room.



A couple days later, little Jack went to the beach with his dad. Suddenly, a cry for help broke the peaceful coastal scene. They spotted a man drowning in the ocean. Tom swam over quickly and pulled the man onto the beach. Tom performed CPR and mouth to mouth resuscitation until the man regained his consciousness.

That night, little Jack went to his dad's office and asked him a surprising question with a solemn and innocent face, "Dad, why did you save a total stranger today?"



Tom replied, "Because he was dying, that's why."

Little Jack asked, "Isn't that the doctors' job? Why bother?"

"No, saving lives is not just reserved for doctors."

Little Jack pressed on anxiously, "Dad, Uncle Jimmy is also dying, why didn't you save him? Our pastor said that if someone doesn't believe in Jesus, he'll die. And you told me that too. Uncle Jimmy is my uncle, and I think...I think sharing the gospel...is not just for pastors." Upon these words, Tom was struck silent, and he turned red down to his neck.

A few days later, Tom invited Uncle Jimmy over again. Both Tom and little Jack shared the gospel. Uncle Jimmy was filled with joy. He said to Tom, "I'm so glad you shared these messages with me today. I was actually wondering why you didn't mention Jesus to me before since you are a Christian!" ◆



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