

## *Worth the Effort*

I recently read a story in a book called *Small Miracles*. It changed my life. It changed the way I think. I think it'll be one of those stories I remember forever. I want to share it with you.

It was the testimony of a man who was walking down a dimly lit street late one evening. He heard muffled screams coming from behind a clump of bushes. Alarmed, he slowed down to listen and panicked when he realized that what he was hearing were the unmistakable sounds of a struggle: heavy grunting, frantic scuffling, the tearing of fabric. Only yards from where he stood, a woman was being attacked. Should he get involved? He was frightened for his own safety and cursed himself for having taken this new route home! What if HE became another statistic? Shouldn't he just run to the nearest phone and call the police? But no, he couldn't just walk away, even from an unknown woman, even if it did mean risking his own life. Although it seemed like an eternity, the decision was made in seconds...but already the girl's cries were growing weaker. He knew he had to act quickly. He wasn't a brave man, nor an athlete, but once he had finally resolved to help the girl, he became strangely transformed. He ran behind the bushes and pulled the assailant off the woman. In a high-stakes wrestling match, they fell to the ground and struggled for a few minutes until the attacker finally jumped up and escaped. Panting hard, he scrambled upright and approached the girl, who was cowering behind a tree, sobbing in the darkness. He could barely see her outline, but could certainly sense her shock and fear. Not wanting to scare her further, he spoke gently from a distance, "It's OK. The man ran away and you're safe now." There was a long pause and then he heard her words, uttered in wonder and amazement. "Dad, is that you?" Then from behind the tree, stepped his youngest daughter.



## *Fellowship*

1. When has fear for your own safety or reputation caused you to make a decision you later regretted? What were the results?
2. When have you overcome fear to do the right thing? What were the results?



## Discipleship

After the story we began our session with today, I don't think I'll ever again just give a cursory glance to the story of the Good Samaritan! You may already be familiar with it. A man falls into the hands of robbers. They strip him, beat him and leave him for dead. Several people had opportunity to help...first a priest, who decided to pass by on the other side. Then a super-religious Levite...who also didn't want to get his hands dirty. Finally, the third time was a charm, and a Samaritan, himself despised as "unclean", took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, loaded him on his donkey and spared no expense for his care at an inn.

Jesus told this story after a Teacher of the Law wanted to trap Him! In fact, this teacher didn't expect to be *taught* anything...fully expecting to come out smelling pretty good from this encounter with Jesus! He felt good about himself and his spirituality...until Jesus put his love to the microscope of self-sacrifice. You see Jesus has set the bar when it comes to love, telling us to love others as He has loved us. The standard is high: loving God with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength, then loving our neighbor as ourselves! In fact, if we want to know how we are doing in the "loving God" department...all we need to do is take a look at how we are loving our neighbor. This makes us all feel a bit uncomfortable, as it did the teacher of the Law; so wanting to justify himself, he pushes ahead: "Well...fine! But who's my neighbor?" Maybe his relationship with the guy right next door was great! They borrowed each others jars when theirs had a crack; they'd even loan each other a camel if need be. But Jesus' story removes all doubt: a self-righteous, "I'll love if it's not too much trouble" love is not good enough.

The hurt man in Luke could have died, and no one would have been the wiser if the Samaritan had also passed by. The attacked girl never would have known that someone could have helped her...yet chose not to. But it's been said that a person's *true character* is revealed by what he does when no one is watching. That's the kind of character we see in the story in Luke, as well as the man rescuing who he thought was an "unknown woman." It's the kind of character that doesn't care WHO the recipient is, how much money they have, or what they can do for me...they are precious in the eyes of God and *that* makes them worthy of my interest and self-sacrifice.

You can tell a lot about a man, or woman, by the way he treats someone who can do nothing for him. One day the phone rang in a wealthy, high-society home and on the other end was a son who had just returned for a war and was on his way home! His folks weren't too accepting of those of a lower social standing. They had money, lots of it, and enjoyed living life their way! The boy said to his mother, "I just called to tell you that I wanted to bring a buddy home with me." His mother replied, "Sure, bring him along for a few days," knowing it wouldn't cramp her style or put her out too much. "But mom,

there is something you need to know about this boy. One leg is gone, one arm is missing, one eye's gone, and his face is quite disfigured. Is it still all right if I bring him home?" His mother repeated her reply, "Bring him home for a few days." The son said, "You don't understand me, mother. I want to bring him home to *live* with us." The mother began to make all kinds of excuses about embarrassment and what people would think, when she suddenly heard the phone click. A few hours later the police called and the mother picked up the phone again. The sergeant on the other end said, "We just found a boy with one arm, one leg, one eye and a mangled face, who has just killed himself with a shot in the head. The identification papers on the body say that he is your son."

Let's not wait until we get to heaven and find out that we've missed out on the blessings of being a blessing! Jesus has a kingdom prepared for those who minister in His name. And one day we will discover (with either overwhelming regret or joy), that whatever we did to the least of these, we were actually doing to *HIM!* Now, isn't *that* worth the effort?



## Ministry

3. Read Luke 10:25-37. The Samaritans were not valued in this culture. How are you encouraged by the fact that it was the *Samaritan* who helped the man instead of the priest or Levite?
4. What excuses might each of the travellers had to *not* help the injured? How can you relate?
5. Read I John 3:16-17. What is indispensable if we are lovers of God?
6. Read Matthew 25:31-46. How does this passage motivate you to love others?
7. From the Matthew passage, which side of the Son of Man would you be put?



## Evangelism

You don't have to be a Samaritan to fill the role of one. I heard recently about a young man who was seen doing high quality tile work. A wealthy man noticed his skill and asked if he could come to his town and work for him as soon as the present job was done. The young man was glad to find work and said he thought he would be done on Wednesday—at which time he could come to the rich man's town and begin working for him. He was given a little money for the bus ride, with the rest of his pay due upon completing each day's work. Unfortunately, the young man found that the job he was

working on took two days longer than expected, and he wasn't able to arrive for his new job until Friday. When he knocked on the door of the rich man's house and tried to explain what happened, he was met with screaming and lecturing, and was told that a replacement had been found. He had no job.

Now, if he had planned ahead better, and found a way to keep his prospective employer informed—this wouldn't have happened. But as it was, our young friend had no money in his pocket for a return bus ticket home. He had been expecting to sleep at the job site and earn the money he needed.

Not sure what to do, our young friend went to the bus station, hoping to run into a friend that might loan him the money to get home—he found no one. He asked a few strangers, but no one was interested in his plight. Apparently there were no helpful Samaritans around! He was getting tired and thought, “Well, maybe tomorrow I'll find a friend to help me get home”. So he walked across the street to a park and sat on the bench—no food and no place to sleep.

However, he did end up falling asleep that night on the park bench, only to be awoken the next morning by the police. They were sweeping the park for “Vagrants”. The police were not sympathetic to his story and took him to jail—sentenced for 30 days. On his first night there he was repeatedly raped and abused, and was never the same again. Pain is everywhere!

It's in the prisons, it's on the streets and it hides behind the pretty closed doors on your street. People need the Lord, and they need you to be there in their life—being His hands and His feet and His personal representative. Pray as a group about how you could start another group like this one to reach out to your community. Maybe even pray about how you could find a way to start 100 groups like this one. And please pray and ask God if there is a ministry you could adopt...maybe even a prison ministry! Fulfill the verse of Matthew 25:36, “...I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.”



## *Worship*

8. Praise God for the opportunities He will bring your way this week, and pray for each of those who will receive your care.