



# Love, Compassion, and Justice

## What it *really* means to love your neighbor

You can use this Bible Study on your own or as part of a group. Go to <http://todayschristianwomanstore.com/biblestudies.html> to download **free** resources on how to lead a life-changing Bible study and tips for getting the most out of participating in small group experience.

**Scripture Focus:** Isaiah 58:6–8; Amos 5:11–12, 21–24; Micah 6:8; Matthew 25:31–46; Luke 10:25–37

**Article:** “Love That Heals” by Amber Robinson, [TodaysChristianWoman.com](http://TodaysChristianWoman.com)

“**T**he news was filled with dramatic stories, and I was weary. Weary of disasters, devastation, and more tears,” writes Amber Robinson in “Love that Heals.” Discouraged and overwhelmed by the world’s seemingly endless bad news and cascade of needs and injustices, Amber wondered, *What does the Bible require me to do about this?*

Ever been there? Heartache and overwhelming need surround us when we open our eyes to see it. That’s one reason it’s so tempting to shut our eyes and try to ignore the injustice that surrounds us! But Scripture calls us to something different; rather than self-centered comfort, Scripture invites us into a love that costs us something—a love that heals.

This Today’s Christian Woman Bible Study will help you deepen your faith as you dig into Scripture, reflect on the truth of God’s Word, and take action steps to live out your faith when it comes to justice, compassion, and God-honoring love. You can use this Today’s Christian Woman Bible Study on your own as part of your personal spiritual growth, or you can use it in a group setting as you discuss God’s Word with a community of friends and grow in faith together.

## Connect

Option: If you'd like, begin your study with this interactive experience.

Form pairs and give each pair \$3 in play money (or real money). Each pair should imagine they're in a family and they've got just a total of \$3 (\$1.50 per person) to spend on food *for an entire day*. Pairs can brainstorm what they'd purchase and why. For those in extreme poverty around the globe, \$1.50 is the equivalent of the amount of money they have to spend on food each day! If you want, look together at [livebelowtheline.com](http://livebelowtheline.com) to learn more.

## Get Ready

**Before the study, read the article “Love That Heals” (included at the end of this study). Or, if you'd prefer, begin your meeting by reading the article aloud as a group.**



## Open Up

Just a few minutes watching the news or surfing the Internet can bring us face to face with a painful reality: We live in an unjust world! Crime, domestic violence, educational inequality, pollution, child abuse, racism, abortion, and poverty can be found right in our own communities. We live among situations that make us want to shout, “That’s not *right!*” And if we do a bit more research to look at the

situation around the globe, we’re confronted with even greater horrors: poverty that’s extreme, children dying of starvation or from preventable disease, human trafficking, genocide, kids recruited as soldiers, slave-like working conditions, starvation, gender-based violence, and more. Deep in our soul, we cry out: “That’s not *just!*”

When we’re confronted with all that’s wrong in the world, God wants us as his people to do more than feel righteous anger and then go along with our normal lives after the feeling fades. Scripture invites us to live a life of love that responds to injustice with action.

>> What stands out to you most from the article “Love That Heals”? Why?

>> What's your gut reaction to the following words and phrases?

- neighbor
- compassion
- the poor
- social justice
- the oppressed

What ideas, feelings, or images come to mind? Is your reaction positive, negative, or neutral? Explain.

>> Scripture calls us to live righteous, God-honoring lives. What form do you think that righteousness should take? Of the following, which do you think Christians should most focus on and why?

- (1) Personal moral behavior
- (2) Social issues
- (3) Political and legal action

## Seek

Before launching into your time of Scripture exploration, pause as a group to pray. Express your desire to seek out God's truth in his Word and to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit during your discussion.

## Discover

### The needy are our neighbors.

Loving others is not as easy as it sounds. Sometimes loving our literal next-door neighbors can seem like an impossible task. But the love Jesus calls us to is radical and pushes us far beyond our safe, tidy definition of neighbor (which often is "someone I know and like.") In fact, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan challenges us to see that "neighborliness" defies cultural, geographic, and economic boundaries. Read **Luke 10:25–37**.

In her article, Amber Robinson explains, "this idea of 'neighbor' is far more intimate and invasive than ours today! . . . The question 'Who is my neighbor?' for us today might be something more like 'Who is my family?' We know we have

intimate and invasive obligations to our moms and dads, brothers and sisters, spouses, and children. Yet in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is telling us that we, too, need to extend our circle.” As we extend that circle of God-honoring love, we see God drawing in the poor, the needy, the oppressed—even those who live on the other side of the globe.

- >> How do you feel personally convicted or inspired by Christ’s parable? Why?
- >> Amber writes that she could relate to the expert in the law who wanted to justify his actions by asking, “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29). When do you find yourself justifying a limited interpretation of who God is calling you to love? Share candid examples.
- >> On the other hand, God doesn’t call us to feel overwhelmingly obligated to every need on this planet. (Burnout!) What do you think is a good balance between loving the needy and maintaining your own emotional and spiritual health?

### When we care for the needy, we give testimony to our faith in God.

“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24, NIV).

This oft-quoted passage from Amos was delivered at a time when Israel was prosperous and powerful, but also morally bankrupt and socially corrupt. God said their worship was offensive. A better testimony to Israel’s covenant relationship with God would be fair treatment of all people and characteristic righteousness in all their relationships. Read **Isaiah 58:6–8**; **Amos 5:11–12, 21–24**; and **Micah 6:8**.

The indictment begun by the prophets—Isaiah, Amos, Micah, and others—was amplified by Jesus. Eager to preserve the covenant relationship between God and the Jews, the Pharisees held tightly to the law. They simultaneously expanded their interpretation of the commandments and tightened the rules such that ordinary people had little hope even of remaining ceremonially clean. In their zeal for pleasing God, they abandoned the spread of their faith. The Pharisees invested their time in personal spiritual improvement at the expense of their neighbors, the poor, the lost, and the faithless.

To these very faithful, very religious men, Jesus spoke the harshest words. He regularly criticized those who claimed to be righteous while ignoring the needy. In one of his last teachings, Jesus underscored the ethic of his earthly lifetime—that faith is borne out in service, especially in the treatment of the poor. Read **Matthew 25:31–46**.

## Optional Activity

- >> What's one phrase or sentence from the passages you read that particularly resonates with you? Why?
- >> In many churches today, people think of evangelism and justice as two separate things. Some churches focus on one, other churches focus on the other. But how do you observe these biblical passages connecting the two? Why is this significant?
- >> Are there ever legitimate reasons to separate justice and evangelism? Explain.

As a group, gather around a computer, go to YouTube.com, and watch one of the versions of “**The Poor Will Not Always Be With Us**” from Live58Now (a network of Christian organizations including Compassion International). Share your reflections on the video: What surprised you? What encouraged you? What inspired you?

### When we care for the needy, we serve Jesus Christ and affect our ultimate judgment.

Matthew's Gospel records another powerful motivation to care for those in need: judgment. It's important, first, to affirm that the final disposition of our souls is based on faith in Christ who died for our sins. Our salvation is not based on our own works (see **Ephesians 2:8–9**). But Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 25** makes it clear that our actions on earth, including our care for the poor, have implications in eternity.

Jesus charges the church with responsibility for the needy and gives our actions—or the lack of them—eternal consequence. It should be noted that sins of omission—what we did *not* do—are just as serious as sins of commission—what we did do that we shouldn't have done (v. 45). Like the parable of the Good Samaritan, this passage radically challenges us to expand our understanding of what it looks like to love those in need.

Matthew 25 identifies Christ with the needy. Beyond just the idea of judgment, this passage urges us to find a deep motivation for ministry; as we care for the hungry, the sick, and the poor we can do so motivated by our own love for Jesus. This love for Christ can help us love those who may seem quite unlovable to us.

- >> Who are some people you know of or ministries you know about who set a great example for you of the principles in Matthew 25? Describe their ministry and character.

- >> What similarities do you see linking the parable of the Good Samaritan with this teaching of Jesus? Compare and contrast Jesus' main ideas in these two passages.
- >> When has love for Jesus motivated you to serve someone else? How did love for Christ empower you to serve? Describe your experience.

## Change

In her article, Robinson quotes Robert Lupton: “Don’t reach for your billfold; it is not close enough to your heart. Don’t raise your hand to volunteer for another committee in the ecclesiastical bureaucracy; tokenism is an unfit gift. Rather, look within. What invigorates you? What causes you to wake up before dawn with a new idea spinning in your mind? What fuels your imagination, even when you are fatigued? Here is where you will find your most valued treasure. Here is where you will find a gift worthy of your Lord.” Though we cannot meet every need in the world—nor should we try!—we can follow God’s leading to make a difference in the areas he calls us to minister.

- >> Robinson outlines specific justice-motivated choices we can make to better love our neighbors. Which of her ideas do you want to put into practice? What other ideas, choices, and principles would you add?
- >> In light of all you’ve read and discussed, what’s one attitude, action, or pattern in your life that you sense God is leading you to change?

## Take Action

**Choose one of the following steps you’ll do after the study to apply God’s Word to your life.**

- ▶ Select one of the passages you read during this study and commit it to memory. Make a daily habit of meditating on that passage from Scripture, inviting God to impress his truth upon your heart.
- ▶ Meet with a friend from your church to discuss three arenas in which the church may effect change: (1) personal moral behavior, (2) social issues, and (3) political and legal action. For each, name two specific needs in your community. What are some specific ways your church could better bring about change to meet these needs? Are there existing ministries or social action groups your church could support? Are there new ministries your church could start? What changes would be required of the congregation—in terms of resources or attitudes—to start such

ministries? What changes would be required of you personally to support such ministries?

- ▶ Fast from a meal this week and donate the money you would have spent on your own food to a hunger-related ministry such as a local homeless shelter or a global ministry like Compassion International or World Vision.

## Commit

Spend time praying aloud as a group for specific ministries you know of that care for the needy and work for justice: name ministries in your church, local Christian organizations, global organizations, missionary families, or members of your church family. Also pray for your own group, asking God to lead each of you individually as you seek to obey his call to a life of love, compassion, and justice.



## Explore More

***Want to dig deeper into this topic? Check out these articles and online resources.***

- >> **Christians and Social Justice Video Study** from **SmallGroups.com**
- >> **Justice in the Suburbs** from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**
- >> **Looking the Other Way** from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**
- >> **Stepping Up to Justice** from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**
- >> **Who Is My Neighbor?** from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

—Study by Eric Reed and Kelli B. Trujillo. Eric is the former managing editor of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL. Kelli is an editor and the author of the Flourishing Faith devotional series for women ([www.flourishing-faith.com](http://www.flourishing-faith.com)).





## Love that Heals

*What does it mean to love my neighbor as myself?*

By Amber Robinson

One rainy Saturday, I stared out the kitchen window as I washed dishes. Another wave of tornadoes had ravaged small towns across the nation. The news was filled with dramatic stories, and I was weary. Weary of disasters, devastation, and more tears. Weary of the conflict that will not be resolved this side of heaven.

What does the Bible require me to do about this? To love God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love my neighbor as myself (Luke 10:27). This is much easier said than done.

The legalist inside of me answers back: *But how many? How many do I have to help? Who is my neighbor?* And just like the lawyer who asked Jesus who exactly his neighbor was (**Luke 10:29**), the legalist was given a story.

### A New Neighborhood

A *neighbor*, to a Jew living in the days of Christ, would have shared ethnic heritage, religion, defenses, land and water access, and trade. He would have been obligated by the Torah to extend debt-forgiveness, hospitality, and other cultural favors not offered to outsiders. He would have had no such obligation to Gentiles or strangers. And yet even this idea of “neighbor” is far more intimate and invasive than ours today!

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *neighbor*? A grumpy man who complains about kids on his lawn? Fun friends who share a meal? Partiers who block your driveway? Nameless people who move in and out?

The question “Who is my neighbor?” for us today might be something more like “Who is my family?” We know we have intimate and invasive obligations to our moms and dads, brothers and sisters, spouses, and children. Yet in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is telling us that we, too, need to extend our circle.

### Shown Up by those Outside Our Faith

The day I was wearied by news of natural disasters, I wanted to justify myself. Just like the religious expert in the story, I found myself saying, *Haven't I helped enough already?* Yet Jesus wants me to continue to see and realize my self-centeredness.



In the Good Samaritan story Jesus told the religious expert that the wounded man was abused by his enemies. The path of Jericho was even nicknamed the “path of blood.” Caverns and steep drop-offs along the path made pedestrians easy targets for cruel thieves.

Yet the priests whose very office was atonement walked right on by. Were they hard-hearted? Were they compassion-fatigued like I was that rainy night by the window?

Many actors, businesses, and secular organizations are ahead of Christ-followers in the way of compassion. To be fair, I know of great compassion work being done by many Christians. But we should be the first responders whose very faith is a woven story of grace, love, and redemption!

### **Close the Distance**

Matthew Henry describes the Samaritan, the heated enemy of the Jews, in poetic language: “When he drew out his soul, he reached forth his hand . . .” Love closes the distance with physical presence, human touch, and comforting words.

The Good Samaritan did not keep himself at a distance, but bound up the Jew’s wounds, using his own linen, oil, and wine. He went much further than simple courtesy by bringing him to an inn and making arrangements for his welfare with kindness rarely seen outside of actions toward friends and family.

We don’t live in the culture of Jews and Samaritans, but we still have those we may keep at a safe distance, including immigrants, refugees, and international students. We also often consider religions that persecute Christians, countries with different foreign policies, and criminals in prison as our enemies. And we often forget to even consider the homeless, the elderly, the disabled, the impoverished, and the sick beautiful.

### **A Love that Costs is a Love that Heals**

When I teach justice seminars, a baffling moment usually occurs at the end during Q&A. We have spent hours together discussing simple, practical ways to live compassionately, yet someone inevitably asks, “What simple thing can I do to make a difference?”

I was slow to catch on, but finally realized that, no matter how simple the step, change is hard. What the questioner really wants to know is, “Which one of these things can I change . . . *and still be comfortable?*”

The answer? Nothing.

One first step for me on my journey was to change one store I frequented. The goal was to buy less from the supply chain of sweatshops. Simple? Yes. Comfortable? No. Although this seems ridiculous in light of the atrocity of slavery, it took some getting used to before it became habit.

But a refusal to embrace change is a refusal to embrace true, cleansing joy and utter transformation.

**Isaiah 58** promises us that if we would give ourselves to taking care of the oppressed, “our wounds will quickly heal.” Later we find even more promises of protection, light, guidance, joy, and inheritance.

We see an amazing thing happening here—when we love someone else, our own healing occurs. Give your life away and get more life back. Try to hold on to your life, but lose it instead (**Luke 17:33**).

### Now Go and Do the Same

With all the programs, special events, and large organizations that exist to end massive problems like poverty and disease, we cannot rule out the power of one person (the Samaritan) helping one other person (his “neighbor”).

We have the ability and freedom to . . .

- increase our awareness of local and world news;
- welcome interruptions as sacred appointments;
- be wary of technology and **entertainment distractions**;
- be educated on the **signs of human trafficking** all around us;
- consider our global citizenship in the **products we purchase**;
- develop our passions and gifts to aid the oppressed.

Jesus offered the lawyer—and us—this convicting and inspiring conclusion to his parable of the Good Samaritan: “Now go and do the same” (Luke 10:37). How will you show mercy and compassion? Who will you nurture and serve?

In **Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life**, Robert Lupton challenges us: “Don’t reach for your billfold; it is not close enough to your heart. Don’t raise your hand to volunteer for another committee in the ecclesiastical bureaucracy; tokenism is an unfit gift. Rather, look within. What invigorates you? What causes you to wake up

before dawn with a new idea spinning in your mind? What fuels your imagination, even when you are fatigued? Here is where you will find your most valued treasure. Here is where you will find a gift worthy of your Lord.”

—**Amber Robinson** is author of **Mercy Rising: Simple Ways to Practice Justice and Compassion**. She advocates for vulnerable children with **Compassion International**, helps educate others to spot signs of trafficking in their own cities, and finds peace in her organic garden. This article was first published on **TodaysChristianWoman.com** in April 2013.

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