

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)

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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

No. 1

January 19, 2023

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The Good Neighbor

While on vacation in Virginia Beach we went to the shops on the pier and on our way back to the hotel I found a credit card laying on the pier. I picked it up and looked around to see if anyone was looking for it. I noticed that it was a Chinese credit card and I did not see anyone that looked like they might be Chinese. However, I remember seeing a young Asian couple in one of the shops on the pier but when I looked for them, I could not find them. So we sat for about 15 minutes on a bench near the pier hoping for a chance to see them walk by. Since the card was not found in a store I figured it would be best to call the credit card company and report the card being found. We went to our room and I tried to call the credit card company but my cell phone was not authorized to make intercontinental phone calls. I looked up the bank on the internet but they did not have any branches here in the United States. So, I went back to the store where I last saw the young Asian couple and turned in the card. The store owner thanked me and called me a Good Samaritan. In my thinking, that is not being a Good Samaritan, it is simply being honest and doing the right thing as we Christians are called to do.

The story of the Good Samaritan is found in Luke 10:25-37. A lawyer tested Jesus with the question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus pointed to the law "love the Lord with all your heart ... and your neighbor as yourself." Then the lawyer asks: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered that question with the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan stopped to care for a wounded man while a priest and a Levite walked by. The Samaritan cared for his wounds, put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and cared for him. He paid for the room and promised to pay more on his return.

We know the story very well but we often overlook some of the key points of the story. We are biblically mandated to love God, love your neighbor, and love your individual self. There is interconnectedness between the three aspects of love – love for God, love for your neighbor, and love for yourself. The Samaritan managed to care for the wounded man while he finished his own journey. There were no consequential burdens that he endured, no risk of burn out, and no unhealthy patterns of interaction.

There is an alarming rate of burn out among pastors. I believe that this is because the Lord's work is never finished, pastors are typically unprepared and unskilled at managing conflict, and pastors often fail to empower a ministry team. Christians, and in particular religious leaders (pastors, elders, deacons, committee chairs etc.) have to seek a balance in life between care of self and care of others. The amount of suffering, trauma, and need that you encounter in spiritual care settings can be overwhelming. You have to have a healthy balance between love of God, love of your neighbor, and love of yourself.

We are in it for the long haul. Therefore we must learn to thrive, not just survive. To be in good spiritual condition requires plenty of reserve which includes an active prayer and Bible study life, rest and relaxation, hobbies and activities outside of the ministry, as well as healthy friend and family relationships. The life of Christ is the epitome of being a Good Samaritan. He did not heal all of the sick in Palestine and he did not feed all of the hungry. He did not leave us with a mandate to meet every need of every person we come into contact with. What he did is he gave us a biblical mandate for the interconnectedness of love – to love God, to love your neighbor, and to love yourself.

Thank you,
George