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Life in the Community



What do you like best about your community?

QUESTION 1

#BSFLIdentity

THE POINT

Loving Jesus means personally helping those in need.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Has your town made the list?

A variety of real estate, business, and travel websites keep updated lists of the best cities to live in, the best neighborhoods for bringing up children, the best business-friendly cities, and on and on.

One word that might be used to describe the foundation of these lists is “treatment.” How do we treat tourists and other visitors to our area? How do teachers and others treat our kids? How well do local governments and groups treat businesses in the area? We can identify a community by how it treats others.

In a similar way, you reveal your true identity in the way you treat others. That’s because how we as Christians treat others—how we love and respond to their needs—is directly connected to our love for God and our relationship with Him.

Matthew recorded in his Gospel a powerful message from Jesus on how our identities in Christ are lived out in our community. He made a direct link between what we do for Him and what we do for others.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 25:34-36 (CSB)

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation 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 took me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.”

To help us see how we live out our identities as His followers, Jesus told a parable about His eventual return to earth. Earlier in Matthew 24:3, His disciples asked Jesus about “the sign of your coming and of the end of the age.” Jesus responded by telling several parables to describe the kingdom of heaven and what it will be like. Then, He concluded His instruction with a final parable that gave a picture of His second coming that included all the nations coming before Him as He sits on the throne (25:31-32).

From verses 31 and 34 we know the King is the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. As all the people gathered before Him, the King separated them into two groups, “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (v. 32). These two animals were often herded together, but sheep were more highly valued because of their wool. In Jesus’ parable, these more highly valued animals were placed on the right, symbolizing the place of honor.

Jesus issued an invitation in verse 34 to the “sheep” because of how they treated Him. Jesus listed all the ways they met His needs. Together these needs represent what we need to survive and have any quality of life.

- » **Hungry and thirsty.** Food and water are two of our most basic daily needs. In biblical culture, water could be hard to come by at times, especially in late summer or early fall. To share this precious commodity would be a great act of love.

What modern circumstances come to mind when you read these verses?

QUESTION 2

- » **A stranger.** In Jesus' day, when a stranger—a non-resident—came to town, he usually came with no job or means of supporting himself. He typically would be viewed with suspicion, even prejudice. It was not uncommon for people to take advantage of such a person. Jesus' teaching to help strangers was nothing new. Even in the Old Testament, the law called for God's people to look after strangers (Leviticus 19:10,33-34).
- » **Naked.** This description usually referred to someone wearing only an undergarment; it could also mean the person was poorly dressed. If you've ever been surprised by a cold front blowing through, dropping the temperature, and leaving you shivering without a coat, you know what it is like to be inadequately dressed.
- » **Sick.** We've all known a time of illness when someone had to wait on us, even if it was just a 24-hour bug. Even worse, long-term or chronic situations require ongoing care. In the first-century culture, they did not have "sick days" like many companies provide us today. If you were sick, you didn't get paid. The visits of a caring individual were especially beneficial, even life-saving.
- » **Imprisoned.** Even today, a person who is incarcerated has no income, and therefore, no way to provide for his family. The first-century prisoner, though, faced an added challenge. Their penal system provided nothing at all for the inmates; they just locked them up. Consequently, prisoners had to depend on others to bring them food.

Society has different views on how to handle needs like these: church ministries, charities, and government involvement. We should not dismiss these different approaches, but pay close attention to the personal touch in Jesus' words. For example: "I was a stranger and *you* took me in" [emphasis added]. These people didn't just give money or help from a distance; they got personally involved.

What keeps us from reaching out to those who need our help?

QUESTION 3

With so many needs in our community and beyond, how do we decide whom to help?

QUESTION 4

Matthew 25:37-40 (CSB)

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 take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

You’ve got to love the reaction of the sheep, the ones Jesus now called “the righteous” (v. 37). They were surprised! They never recalled seeing Jesus in those dire straits. They didn’t deny helping others; they just couldn’t remember seeing Jesus among those they helped. To them, Jesus replied with the most powerful statement in this parable: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (v. 40).

The second half of the parable (vv. 41-46) is symmetrical with the first half, but the “goats”—“those on the left” (v. 41)—failed to do everything the righteous freely did. They showed a completely different attitude in their reactions to the situations on Jesus’ list. Whereas the righteous helped out of an instinctive love, the attitude of the unrighteous was calculating. Their approach wasn’t to help someone simply because someone needed help, but only





What is something we will do as a group to serve Jesus by serving “the least of these”?

QUESTION 5

when it would benefit them. Helping Jesus surely would win God’s approval; helping just anybody else was not worth their time.

Surely to the horror of those He had placed on His left, the Lord answered, “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. And they will go away into eternal punishment” (vv. 45-46a).

Jesus referred to “the least of these brothers and sisters of mine” (v. 40). With what people is Jesus identifying Himself? The brothers being helped are our brothers in Christ. This parallels what Jesus said earlier in the Gospel of Matthew: “And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward” (10:42).

As Christians, we are family. Throughout the New Testament, believers in the church are referred to as brothers and sisters. Jesus said, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (12:50). It is a great witness to our connection to Christ when we, the church—brothers and sisters in Christ—love and take care of one another. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Does this emphasis mean we don’t have to meet needs outside the church? No. Our love for Jesus compels us to love others both inside and outside the church; we demonstrate that love when we meet needs. We begin with the family of God—“the least of these brothers and sisters of mine” (v. 40)—but we don’t stop there.

Your identity in Christ is demonstrated in how you live and serve in the community: first, the community of faith, and second, the community at large. Let’s serve Jesus by serving others.

"How we treat others—how we love and respond to their needs—is directly connected to our love for God."

MATT BROWN

BE THE CHURCH



Which of the following needs do you see impacting young adults in your small group or community?

Poverty/ Hunger

Homelessness

Underemployment

Imprisonment

Lack of sufficient housing

Lack of healthy food options

Significant Debt

Lack of sufficient clothing

Other: _____

What talents, resources, and abilities are present among the people in your group that could be used to meet one of the needs listed above?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you put this passage into practice this week?

- » **Start small.** You'll see someone who needs help this week. Step in and help, without making a judgment call about whether or not he or she deserves help.
- » **Work together.** As a group, identify a need in your group or church and create a strategy for helping that person or family through whatever hardship they are facing.
- » **Get involved.** Look into the ways your church ministers to those in need in your community. How can you actively help those in need in an ongoing way?

The identity of a Christ-follower is wrapped up in Jesus. Who you are in Christ is seen in how you relate to other people. **When you serve others, you are serving Him.**



My thoughts