



The Art Of Showing Up | Interruptible

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Well, welcome Menlo Church. And I'm in the dark sitting here on this Labor Day weekend. Okay, there we go. You're like, where's that voice coming from? My name is Mark. I'm a campus pastor here at our Menlo Park campus and I have the privilege of being a part of our worship services. They've given me a little bit longer than my usual three and a half minutes and it's great to be able to proclaim God's word to you today.

We're in a series called "The Art of Showing Up" and we're looking at passages of scripture that teach us about the power of presence. There's a famous quote that's not from the Bible that says 80% of

success in life is just showing up. Now, I don't know where the 80% number came from or how scientifically accurate that is, which reminds me of another famous quote that 80% of statistics are made up on the spot. It's probably more like 74.5% I think, but either way, showing up matters.

Showing up is how we can move from good intentions to good deeds, from aspirational living to actual living and living out God's love. But here's the challenge: this is really hard. At least it is for me. Maybe I'm the only one who finds his mind going in a hundred different directions at times, preoccupied by all of the things that need to get done this week or things I've done that I'm thinking about or events going on in the world that I have absolutely no control about, or distracted by continuous notifications on my phone that I can neglect to be present right where I am in the moment God has placed me with the people that God has put in front of me.

We can so easily just cruise through life not being present. I mean, being there but not really being there.

So last week Phil talked about how Jesus prioritized calling over comfort. And this week we are looking at what it means to be interruptible, to be more present with and for the people around us, and to love our neighbor in a world where there is so much distrust, division, and distraction.

So what would it look like for followers of Jesus to be more present with God, more present with others, more present for others, even people who aren't like us and maybe people we don't even like? Because when we show up, God shows off. When we show up, God shows up, too.

And we're going to learn today about this from one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. In fact, it's so familiar that people who don't know anything about the Bible refer to it and refer to one of its main characters without even knowing it's from a teaching of Jesus. But before we get into it, let's pray.

God, thank you for this day, this beautiful Labor Day weekend. Thank you that we get to gather together and learn and be encouraged and challenged in our faith. And God, thank you for your love for us and for the ways that you empower us to be neighbors, to show your love to those around us each and every day. And I pray that you would just calm all the distractions going on and help us to be present right here and right now in Jesus' name. Amen.

So today we are looking at the story of the good Samaritan. It's found in Luke chapter 10. And the challenge is this is a story. If you've been around church for any length of time, you're like, "Oh yeah, I know this story." But N.T. Wright, a famous biblical scholar, said this: he said, "The best-known stories are sometimes the hardest to understand." And he's right because familiarity can keep us. It can squelch our curiosity. Familiarity can keep us from digging deeper into something that we think we already know.

But there's a reason why this story has so pervaded throughout history. There's a reason why this story has endured even beyond

those who call themselves Christians. And we want to take a look at this with some fresh eyes this morning.

So, here's the context. Jesus is early in his ministry. He's called the 12 disciples to follow him and learn from him. He's been performing miracles. He's been healing the sick. He's been teaching crowds. He's been feeding thousands of people. He has attracted quite a following in the whole region. And he's attracted growing opposition, especially from the religious leaders who see him as a threat.

I mean, here's this Jesus person, this itinerant teacher from Backwoods Galilee, didn't go to seminary, wasn't a priest, didn't have the credentials that the religious leaders and teachers should have. And yet he taught and he acted with power and authority like they had never seen. And this is what happened.

On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke

10:25). Now, that seems like an innocent enough question. But this was a lawyer after all. I mean, not like a first century personal injury attorney. That's the first thing I picture is like a commercial saying, "If you've been injured in a donkey accident, I'll fight for you." But not that kind of lawyer.

This was the lawyer who was an expert in the religious law, the Hebrew scriptures. And he's asking not out of innocent curiosity. He's probing to see what Jesus, the so-called teacher, really knows.

But Jesus, in typical Jesus fashion, answers his loaded question with another loaded question. "What is written in the law?" he replied.

"How do you read it?" He, the lawyer, 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."

(Luke 10:26-27)

Now the lawyer gave the perfect textbook answer. It came from the Shema. The Shema is the most central prayer of the Jewish faith then and to this day. And "Shema" is the first word of this prayer in Hebrew. It means "hear" or "listen" is from the book of Deuteronomy. And it starts out like this: "Shema Israel Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad." "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." And "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

And then the lawyer's answer, I mean, it's perfect. And he even adds the deeper implication to love your neighbor as yourself. And the lawyer is thinking in this moment, "Jesus, I nice try, but I just aced your pop quiz and nailed the extra credit question too." And Jesus agrees.

He says, "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28) And that could have been the end of the story. In trying to test Jesus and get him to say something heretical in that moment, Jesus and this lawyer just came to perfect agreement.

Like, "great, right answer. We're agreed. This is what the law says."

Except knowing and doing are two very different things.

See, the lawyer knew the right answer. But knowing what the law says about love and actually being loving toward other people, those are two different things. And the lawyer knows, the lawyer knows deep in his heart. When it comes to fully living out God's love in that way, that completely, he's not really doing it.

And it's easy for me reading this story to cast stones, to throw some shade at the lawyer. But on my own, to be honest, do I fully love God all the time with all my heart and soul and mind and strength? Am I completely always available to to love my neighbor as myself? I mean, Lord willing, I'm growing in that direction by God's grace day by day, but I still have a long way to go.

Am I willing to offer everything to love with everything I have? Heart, soul, mind, and strength. I mean, this is the core of all the law and the

prophets according to Jesus himself. And I'm called to love the way that Jesus did.

But the lawyer's view on this was a little bit off because we're not called to love God and neighbor as a way to earn eternal life or to merit God's love, to earn God's favor. That's how the lawyer thought about it. And that's where he got it wrong. Because yes, we are called to love God, love our neighbor with everything we've got, but not as a way to earn favor with God because we can't. He already loves us more than we can imagine.

And our love is always a response to the God who has already loved us, who offered everything for us, who has loved you and offered everything for you, even his son. Jesus came to love us completely. God isn't asking us to do anything that he hasn't already demonstrated for us. And Jesus came to show us, to teach us, to empower us to love like he does, heart, soul, mind, strength to love God, love our neighbor. And we can learn to do this because and only because God first loved us.

We can learn to be more present in every situation because in Christ, God came to be present with us, with me, with you, right here, right now.

Now, the lawyer, our friend, the lawyer, he could have gone two ways here. He could have said, "Jesus, I see your point. I see your point. As you're talking to me right now, I realize, you know, I really can't I don't love people that way. I'm not that magnanimous. I'm not that generous. I just can't do that on my own. So, Jesus, let me follow you. Forgive me. Help me to be able to love like that. I see that you do that. I want that in my life." I mean, that's the way I would hope that we would respond when when confronted with with the truth of God and his love and what he asks of us.

But the lawyer, the lawyer, he goes the other direction. The lawyer wants to justify himself. He wants to negotiate the law down to something that's achievable, that's manageable for him. He doesn't want grace. He doesn't want to grow. He wants to be right.

This is what the scripture says. "But he wanted to justify himself." So he asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Of course Jesus. Of course we're to love our neighbor. We know that. But you know it's not that simple. I mean who is my neighbor really? Surely surely when we say neighbor we're talking about the the good people, right?

The lawyer is asking what is the smallest set of people he needs to be able to love in order to fulfill the law and gain eternal life. What's the the least number that I really need to love in that way? I mean, it can't meet everybody, right? So, what's the minimum standard? Who do I not need to love and show compassion to is what the lawyer is really asking. And for a Jew at that time, the assumed definition of neighbor would be your fellow Jew. Your people, not the other people.

So Jesus tells a story. It goes like this. In reply, Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. When he was attacked by robbers, they stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same

road and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite when he came to the place and saw him passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan as he traveled came to where the man was. And when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him, bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said. 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" (Luke 10:30-35)

Now, we don't know much of anything about the man that was beaten and lying by the side of the road. I mean, some scholars assume it must have been a Jewish man. We really don't know. And maybe that's part of the point. He was a human being. He was a person in need, a person made in the image of God. And he was on a dangerous, dangerous road.

This is what the road to Jericho looks like today. It's a winding path. It's an easy place to set up an ambush. And it is still a dangerous path

today because it runs from Jerusalem almost through the entire width of what is now the West Bank. It's not a safe part of the world. And this man is beaten. He's robbed. He's left for dead. And three different people go by.

Now, first the priest, the one who knows the commandments to love God, love neighbor, but he just passes by on the other side. And scholars love to speculate why. Maybe he thought the man was dead. Maybe touching him would make the priest ceremonially unclean and it would complicate all of his religious duties for the next few days. Or maybe the priest was worried there were still robbers in the area, which was possible.

And it's easy again to blame this guy, but he wasn't being unreasonable. I mean, maybe the priest was looking at his phone, watching TikTok videos, didn't even see the guy by the side of the road because he was absorbed in his screen. Or maybe maybe the guy by the side of the road had it coming. I mean, he traveled at the wrong time. It was probably before dawn or right after the sun went

down. Maybe he was counting his cash as he went away from the ATM. He should have been more careful. Maybe he was drunk. Maybe he was on drugs.

We don't know. Regardless, the priest's motives or intent didn't matter in that moment. His actions did. And he passed by on the other side.

And then comes a Levite. Levites weren't priests, but they still worked in the temple. They had a lot of religious duties. He also knew the law. The Levite also passed by on the other side of the road. And this is where the story takes a turn that no one, no one listening in that moment would have expected. I mean, we know we're like, "Oh, this is what the story's about." Nobody saw this part coming.

A Samaritan came, took pity on the wounded man. And we call this man the good Samaritan. But to the lawyer, to people listening to this story at that time, there was no such thing. The Jews and the Samaritans generally hated each other. They had no dealings with

each other. They were despised. They were considered half breeds. But Jesus in this moment, he makes the hated one the hero of this story.

The Samaritan, the outsider, the Samaritan is the one who has compassion for this man lying by the side of the road. The Samaritan is the one who looks at this wounded person and sees a fellow human being in distress. The Samaritan is the one who puts oil on his wounds and gives him wine. He doesn't just call 911 or call Triple A and say the guy needs a tow. He then goes on his way.

The Samaritan is the one who crosses religious lines, socioeconomic lines, ethnic lines. The Samaritan puts the wounded man on his own donkey. We're told he leaves two days' wages with the innkeeper. Leaves his credit card at the front desk, says, "Give him room service. Whatever he needs to order, I'll close the tab when I come back." And then he does come back. I mean, this is extravagant. Shockingly extravagant, especially for these two people and who they would have been in that society.

But here's another crazy thing. The Samaritan wasn't out looking for people to help like he was a part of some, I don't know, a good Samaritan society or something. Like the priest and the Levite, he was on his way somewhere else. If he was taking that road instead of the long way around, he was probably on urgent business, too. Helping a man in need was not part of his plan or his agenda that day, but he did. He was willing to be interrupted. He was willing to be present.

So when it comes to loving my neighbor, am I willing to be present everywhere I go wherever I might be? Am I unhurried enough in my daily rhythms and as I go through life? Am I unhurried enough to be aware? Am I compassionate enough to care? Am I interruptible, anywhere.

Now, I don't like interruptions. Most of us don't, right? I have my priorities, my agenda, my timing, and it's so easy to overlook someone else's needs. And this story really challenges me. I mean, as I was preparing this message, I'm like, this is kind of hard because am I so absorbed in my work, my thoughts, my busyness, my agenda, my

needs, my wants, that I either am unaware or unwilling to be fully present with the people God has put in my path in any given moment.

And I'll tell you what, my son, who's 17, our youngest, he keeps me honest in this. That too many times he's telling me something about his day, a class he was taking, something he did with a friend, maybe even just like, you know, some video game or a YouTube video he was watching that was absolutely fascinating to him. And my brain is in my phone and I'm reading the news or checking important emails or trying to solve Wordle, which I did in three yesterday. I was really proud.

And sometimes he'll stop and he'll say, "Dad, what did I just say?" Like, "Something about a YouTube video." And he's doing that because he can tell I just checked out like I was there kind of going, "uh-huh." But I'm kind of doing this and I'm the adult here. You know how I can't tell him to stay off of his screen because he wants to see if I was listening, if I was present. And the crazy thing is my phone

doesn't care one bit if I'm present with it, but the people around me do.

And the priest, the Levite, they saw, but they didn't choose to be present. In fact, they chose not to be present. They moved away from the man in need. They ignored the interruption. But the Samaritan, the Samaritan of all people, he moved closer. He was present. He was unhurried. He was interruptible. He responded with compassion and mercy no matter where he was.

And now the passage shifts again. There's kind of a story within a story. And the passage here shifts from the story that Jesus is telling back to the real life situation that Jesus was in with this lawyer in that moment.

And Jesus asks the lawyer, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" And the expert in the law replied, you can hear him kind of not even wanting to

say the word Samaritan, like that's the one who had mercy on him.

And Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:36-37)

Notice Jesus never answers the original question. Instead, he asks a different one. The original question is, "Who is my neighbor? Who's in and who's out? Who's worthy of being helped? Who's worthy of my compassion? And who isn't?"

But for Jesus, the question is not who is my neighbor. It's what kind of a neighbor am I? What kind of a neighbor are you? The lens that the lawyer wants to use to inspect other people to see who is worthy to be a neighbor, Jesus flips it around and turns it into a mirror and says, "Don't worry about what that other person is. Don't worry about them. The question is, what kind of a neighbor are you going to be?"

That is not what the lawyer wanted to hear. He wanted to hear something like, "Your neighbors are the ones who obey the law and

who follow my commands. Your neighbors are the people who vote like you, who believe like you, who act like you." And Jewish tradition again held that love for one's neighbors meant those of the same blood and belief. True Jews, not these Samaritans.

But Jesus is saying to this Jewish teacher of the law, "Go be more like a Samaritan." Which in context would have been shocking and it was meant to be. It was meant to challenge the whole paradigm of how this lawyer, this teacher of the religious law was thinking about faith and eternity and life and love. Because this is a story about the gospel.

The Good Samaritan is a story about grace. It's a story about compassion. It's a story about God's countercultural, unmerited, unwarranted, unearnable love. And it's an invitation to live into that love. And that love, that love of God that's displayed in this story is shockingly extravagant.

So when we read the story, imagine where you are in it. Now, sometimes I'm more like the priest or the Levite, and I can find all kinds of excuses not to help, not to be present, not to show compassion, not to enter into someone else's struggle. I'm too tired. I'm too busy. Someone else will help and I'll move away.

And it's also easy to picture ourselves as the Samaritan in that story, that we're the ones offering hope. We're the ones who have whatever that might be. And we're helping these other people, these other souls that need our help. And we want to be more like that. We do want to become more like that. But but but we also might want to imagine ourselves not as the priest or the Levite or the Samaritan, but as the person by the side of the road.

Because apart from Christ, apart from grace, apart from God's compassion and love for us, we are the ones who are beaten, wounded, broken by our old enemies of sin and guilt and shame and addiction and injustice and anger and greed and pride that leave us lonely, anxious, afraid, and without hope.

And yet Jesus, Jesus, the holy one of God, who you would think has no business consorting with sinners and tax collectors and people like us, he notices. He stops. He crosses the barrier between God and people, between saints and sinners. He crosses the road and chooses to be present with me and with you. And he bends down and he touches us. He anoints us. He binds our wounds. He picks us up and he brings us to safety.

He says, "I'll keep coming back for you." And he'll do that again and again and again and again and again. And he's done that for me. He's done that for you. And if you haven't come to know Jesus yet, Jesus will do that for you. And he calls us to do likewise.

To love with everything we've got. To be present and compassionate everywhere we go, but not just to the people we like. The priest, the Levite, they could do that.

The last question here for us is, "Am I a neighbor? Am I willing to be a neighbor to everyone, to anyone that God puts in my path? The good and the bad. People like us, people not like us, people we agree with and people we don't. People who vote like us and people who don't. Stanford and Cal, people eating at Left Bank and the people sleeping at the train station.

See then, as now, hatred and division run deep between groups and peoples and nations and parties. And we are consumed with questions of who is us and who is them? Who do I need to show compassion towards and who don't I? Who belongs and who doesn't? Who are the good people? Who are the bad people?

But Jesus keeps flipping the mirror back towards us and saying, "What kind of a person are you? What kind of a neighbor are you going to be?" This does not mean, hear me, this does not mean we have to agree with everyone or condone everyone's choices or actions or beliefs.

We don't. But Christ, he didn't condone sin, but he had compassion. He was present. He showed up. He showed love. even toward the sinner, even towards us. And Paul declares in Romans chapter 5, "but God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

He crossed the road. He came to where we are. And God loves like that because that's who God is. God is love. And his love is a love that's willing to be present even when it's uncomfortable. God's love is the kind of love that breaks down barriers. The kind of neighbor empowers us to be the kind of neighbor, have the kind of love that our disconnected, distrusting, distracted, divided world desperately, desperately needs.

You know, ever since this story was told in those weeks and months after Jesus told it to 20,000 plus years now, the word Samaritan, it's taken on a whole new meaning. Instead of a term of derision, it became a term of hope. Instead of a sign of hatred between people, it

became a sign of goodwill. It became a name for hospitals and nonprofits.

It's used anytime a stranger helps another person in need. There are laws in every state to protect people who stop and render aid or provide CPR. And we call them good Samaritan laws everywhere we go because Jesus changed the paradigm of what being a neighbor is.

And we have an opportunity today here 2025 in the Bay Area to shift the paradigm of how people see Jesus, of how people think about God, of how people view followers of Jesus by becoming the best neighbors our communities have ever seen.

Lives in the Bay Area will be transformed. Not because we're sitting and learning about God's love, but because with God's help, with his spirit at work, we're able to learn to live out God's love with everything we've got everywhere to everyone God puts in our path.

And here's the good news about that. You don't need to go out of your way. You don't need to go out of your way this week. Look for the people God puts in your way. Might not be the people you think. Might be someone you find a little harder to be a neighbor for. Maybe it's a literal neighbor that you find really hard to be a good neighbor to. But be willing this week to be interrupted, to be present, and see how God shows up.

Wherever your path takes you this week. Whoever God puts in your way, what kind of a neighbor are you going to be? Will you pray with me?

God, thank you for your presence in our lives. Thank you that you loved us first. Thank you that you call us to love you with our heart, soul, mind, strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. Not as a way to earn your love or to earn eternal life, but as a response to your amazing love for us. And God, we can't do this on our own. We need your spirit. We need your strength to help us reflect the compassion of Christ everywhere we go with everyone we meet. And so draw

**people to you and point to your goodness and your compassion and
your love and your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**