



FIRST RESPONDERS | CHAD BRUEGMAN

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

Do you remember where you were when the attack happened on September 11? How did you react watching the first responders running into the burning buildings as all the people were streaming out?

SHARE

This week, Chad kicked off our new series by taking a moment to remember those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, and the honor due to those who are the first responders when tragedy strikes. It is the first responders who come to the aid of people when they are in their moment of desperation. First responders don't discriminate, nor ask questions when someone needs immediate help; they just respond. They run to the pain. They go to the problem, when so many others run the other way. A first responder's priority is to be the first on the scene to help.

It is in God's beautiful nature and character to be the first responder, the one who initiates, the one who goes to save those who are helpless. When we are helpless to save ourselves, it is God who is the rescuer. It was Jesus who laid down his life, so that we could go free. It was Jesus who took on our sins and absorbed the full wrath of God on the cross for us, so that we could be saved, forgiven, and redeemed.

Jesus once told a parable about a first responder. It was in response to a question from a man who was trying to justify himself about his nagging lack of compassion on others.

As Jesus does, he stops everything and tells a story. This religious scholar who would have been considered in 'full-time ministry' by today's standards gets a story about priorities. He was someone the crowds would have looked up to in Jesus' day for his vast knowledge about the Scriptures and his profound insights about God. This person was the type who wasn't shy in the least when it came to publicly challenging other rabbis. He knew his stuff and how to navigate his job. This was an important person who was well equipped to handle people issues and all the public functions of ministry.

With this list of skills and experience, wouldn't you think this religious pedigree was exactly what God was looking for? No; Jesus was looking for something quite different from this religious scholar.

Luke 10:25-37 (The Message)

Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?"

He answered, "What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?"

He said, "That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself."

"Good answer!" said Jesus. "Do it and you'll live."

Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?"

Jesus answered by telling a story. "There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

"A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back.'

"What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

"The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded.

Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

Why do you think the religious scholar wanted so badly to define who his "neighbor" was?

Can you relate to this religious scholar in some ways? If so, how?

When the Samaritan man saw the man's condition, how did his heart react?

Of all the people who passed by, why do you think it was the Samaritan—despised and ridiculed by so many—who felt compassion and empathy for this broken man?

GROW

As Jesus told the story, the crowd must have leaned in when He talked about the minister coming down the road. Surely they thought the pastor would be the hero of the story to help this poor guy! But Jesus turned the tables, revealing the condition of our hearts and shedding light on what we should all prioritize.

One full-time minister decided to cross to the other side of the street so that it would appear to others as though he just must not have seen the man lying there. By distancing himself, things surely wouldn't look as bad. The other church staffer didn't have as much foresight and just plain avoided the injured man. Maybe he just walked around the body on the ground. Jesus pointed out that it was the guy who didn't go to either of their churches who did ministry that day. The Samaritan traveler understood the man's condition, recognized that God wanted him to help, and responded with compassion.

Jesus tells this story to help us all remember that God's priorities should always be our priorities.

Jesus helps this full-time minister remember that the most important thing about his position is that he is in a position to help. I don't believe Jesus told the story to embarrass the pastor publicly, but to remind him and all the listeners that day of how easily our human hearts can harden when we are surrounded by so much need. In fact, the story was moving enough to this religious scholar that he answered Jesus' question about who the real neighbor was by saying, "the one who treated him kindly." The Pastor didn't get offended; rather he allowed his heart to be mended.

Did the good Samaritan spend the week helping the injured man and shirk all his responsibilities? Not at all; he understood the immediate situation, he was capable enough to recognize what God wanted him to do, and responded with compassion. He might have missed a few late-day meetings, but left in the morning and made sure this injured man was being cared for by the innkeeper.

What is usually the biggest obstacle keeping you from stopping and helping someone else?

In the story, Jesus revealed to the listeners just how easy it is to separate our knowledge of God from our heart for God and others. In our culture, we are surrounded by so much need that it is easy to harden our hearts or avoid difficult situations. After reading this story, think about your own heart. In what areas do you feel your heart hardened toward people, and why?

MOVE

As Chad talked about first responders this week, we were all challenged to think about our own heart condition toward the hurting around us. Since we are heirs of the Kingdom of God, we have access to God's power and grace, so that we might lavish the same grace and mercy we have received on others. God wants to use us to be his first responders so that people would experience God's compassion in a seemingly dark and ever-increasing selfish world.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

Whether you feel it or not, if you are a follower of Jesus; God has picked you to be a "minister of reconciliation" in this world. We are his ambassadors and we carry the message of reconciliation. It is truly as if God is making his appeal to the world through us and our actions. The Samaritan man was exactly the type of person God could use. He didn't have all the right words and no religious pedigree, but he responded first.

Being a first responder doesn't always mean that someone needs to be lying in the road bleeding; it can just as easily mean helping or listening to a person everyone else is avoiding. It is taking the time to respond to a need you know about.

Think about the people God has placed in your life. Do you think you have an opportunity to be a first responder to someone? If so, who, and how do you think you could help them?

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men's and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO

Matthew 9:12-13

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."