



Church is a movement that tells a better story

By Steve Chalke

CHAPTER FOUR.

Church is when you reach out and serve others. Luke 10

This episode will help you **engage, reflect and respond** to Church is. We encourage you to explore each episode with friends - if you do, let us know! We'd love to hear about it and your thoughts and ideas.

Each episode has a companion video and each episode title mirrors one of its key themes. Thanks for downloading.

Companion video: churchis.co.uk/stevechalke

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W W W . C H U R C H . C O . U K



Church is when you reach out and serve others

Luke 10 (NIV)

The Good Samaritan



²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷ He 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 neighbour as yourself.’”

²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

³⁰ 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. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ 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.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

When I made that decision at fourteen to become a follower of Jesus I realised that life wasn't about 'my story', but rather 'the story'.

Since then I've slowly come to understand life differently, bringing new shape, meaning and hope to my journey so far. The flawed, broken story I previously knew had been given a cosmic overhaul - a new context - as I realised that my place was amongst the great story. God's big story.

Following Jesus isn't about a check-list or the 'right things to believe' or a doctrinal hit-list. It's a lifestyle that lives and breathes, stretches and grows, reaching out with an open hand to my neighbours and even my enemies, not a clenched fist.

It's easy to take the view that helping your enemy just benefits them - thing is, in Matthew 5, Jesus says it's about us...

⁴³ 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

This brings us to a rather famous story, told by Jesus in response to the question 'Who is my neighbour?'. Jesus replied with what we now call the parable of the Good Samaritan. Here are my thoughts from a book I wrote called Being Human.

'Being Human' - Chapter 22 - God in Disguise

A bit of background is needed here: Jews hated Samaritans. They really hated Samaritans. All Samaritans. On any orthodox reading of their scriptures, it was very clear to them that the people of Samaria were persona non grata. In the Israel of Jesus' day, the 'S-word' was a term of contempt and abuse.

Both Jewish and Samaritan religious leaders taught their people that it was absolutely off limits to have any contact with the opposite group. This tension, which sometimes boiled over into outright hostility – between geographical next-door neighbours – went back generations. Samaria had once been part of the old united kingdom of Israel under King David and

Solomon his son. But that was before the ten northern tribes of the country proclaimed self-rule, separating from, what they perceived to be, the rich South and their corrupt royal family.

All this had taken place nearly a millennium ago. Since then the northern kingdom had been destroyed by Assyria, and the majority of its people dispersed or taken into captivity, never to return.^[2] But the Samaritans had survived and now proudly regarded themselves as the true descendants of those old northern tribes – the guardians of authentic faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. The leaders of the Jews, however, had a very different take on things. As far as they were concerned, the Samaritans were an apostate group of heretics who practised a corrupt and corrupting faith and who had been rejected by God.^[3]

It was in this context that Jesus introduced a very Jewish audience to his story of an abandoned and vulnerable Jew, ignored by two proud members of the Jewish establishment, but eventually helped out by a despised Samaritan traveller. It didn't make easy listening!

Today, you can't help think that Jesus might have told a similar story in terms of Protestants and Catholics, Hutus and Tutsis, Sunnis and Shias, Americans and Communists, Jews and Palestinians, or Evangelicals and gays. The point remains the same. The person who acted with generosity, grace and mercy towards someone on the other side of the fence was the one who was a true neighbour.

The sting in the tale is, of course, this. Just as the religious and political leaders of Jesus' day dismissed his views, teaching and behaviour as naïve, morally scandalous and even down-right heretical, still today little has changed.

The Quakers have a beautiful saying: 'An enemy is a friend whose story we have not heard.' We are always imprisoned by our exclusion of those who are different to us, never released by it. Besides anything else we need them for our own wholeness, for it is only as we build bridges with those who don't see life our way that we begin to confront and deal with the hidden and ugly parts of our own souls. Without them we are diminished, but through our inclusion and acceptance of them our story becomes richer and deeper than it would have otherwise been – we are stretched and renewed.

Questions:

Follow

- Who are your neighbours?
- Who, if you're honest with yourself, might be an enemy to you?

Church

- Whether it's true or not, are there people who naturally feel that your community is against them?

Action

- What could your church do to address the issues of those might feel you're against them?
- What can you do to reconcile yourself with your enemy?