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## Stories of Solidarity :: A Story

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There's this story in the gospels that tells of a man who came to Jesus and asked,

*'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'*

This should capture our attention. I mean, after all... this is THE BIG QUESTION, right?

How can we be 'in' with God?

How can we know we're not headed toward hell?

Think about the implications of this question : *What must I do to inherit eternal life?*

*That* question, answered by the Son of God.

Grab a pen and paper. Take note. Write this down. Pay attention. *His answer may surprise you.*

### ***The Question.***

The young scribe had just the right question for this rebellious Rabbi. *'What must I do?'*

Jesus stopped and turned, his eyes locking with those of the man who asked, seeing through the window of his soul and into his heart. *'What does the Torah tell you?'*

The lawyer had paid attention as a boy. He knew Jewish Law and custom. It was, after all, his profession - to be a student and defender of the Torah.

He flawlessly rattled off the *right answer* in response :

*'You shall 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.'*

Jesus appeared pleased.

Some in the crowd later said they saw the Great Teacher crack a gentle grin.

*'You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.'*

As Jesus turned to continue with his disciples along the path towards Bethany, the man asked :

*'...but who is my neighbor?'*

### ***The Story.***

Jesus answered, 'A man was going down a steeply descending road - the one from *here* to *there* - from Jerusalem to Jericho. On his journey, thieves came and stripped him naked, beat him up and stole all he had, leaving him for dead.

There he lay, alone - black and blue, beaten and bruised, along the side of the highway - dying.

It just so happened that a priest was heading down that way.

The man the prayers offered with his final breaths had been answered. *'Perhaps this priest of God will help me,'* he thought.

Yet the priest passed by him on the other side of the road, pretending not to see.

Then a super priest - a *Levite* - came upon the man.

They made eye contact. The victim looked at the Levite with palpable desperation through his swollen and bloodshot eyes.

*'Please... Help me,'* he managed whisper through the pain.

The Levite paused, but then decidedly passed along the other side just like the priest before him, thinking if he got blood on his hands that others might see him as unclean. Maybe even YHVH would. He therefore continued along his way, leaving the man to die.

*'But then,'* said Jesus, *'a Samaritan came.'*

At this, the crowd sneered. Samaritans were *despised* by the Jews - they were half-breeds with mixed Gentile blood and different forms of worship, which centered around a different mountain with different customs and different priorities. Come to think of it, they weren't just *different* - they were *wrong*.

Noting the crowds' discomfort, Jesus continued, 'When the Samaritan saw the man, he felt compassion for him - the same kind of compassion that YHVH has on us - and moved toward him. He clothed the man and bandaged his wounds, tenderly rubbing a homemade salve into the areas where his skin had been torn open from the attack.

Carefully lifting the man upon his donkey, the Samaritan quietly walked alongside him until the nearest town. Once they arrived, the Samaritan paid for them both to stay at an inn, taking care of the man all throughout the night.

The following day, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper little money he had and also gave instructions : *'Take good care of this man. Whatever you spend above what I've already given you, I will repay when I return.'*

*'Which one of these,'* asked Jesus, *'do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robber's hands?'*

The surprised Scribe muttered his answer. He couldn't quite get the word *Samaritan* out. *'The one who showed him mercy.'*

*'Then go and do the same.'*

### ***The Response.***

*What must we do to inherit eternal life?*

Could it be that the way to be 'in' with God is to join him in breaking down the barriers between 'us' and 'them'? To reject the thinking, paradigm and language of 'in' and 'out' and instead focus on bringing healing to the hurting, no matter their race, color, creed, religion, orientation or any other distinction which designates them as 'Other?'

Could it be that the way to avoid hell is to choose to be an ally of the incarnation toward those who are different than ourselves?

What *else* could Jesus have meant?