

HUMANIZE ME



Sometimes people say a public figure needs to be humanized. What could this mean except that there are things in this world that make us less than human? Jesus is on a mission to make you more human—the kind of human who looks more like the Son of God. This series tackles the forces that keep us from being just as human as God always intended us to be. And it leads us to discover that when we are humanized, we get to humanize others.

HUMANIZE ME • Luke 10:25–37 • Tim McConnell • August 18, 2019

They say that celebrities and politicians need to be humanized to connect with ordinary people. I'm not a celebrity, but I guess I'm enough of some kind of figure that people say this to me from time to time. I say, "I really shouldn't have made that joke about forgetting to wear deodorant on a plane." "Oh, no," they say, "Tim, that just humanizes you." "I'm in a photo with the Mayor at that event, but it looks like I was picking my nose." "That's okay, Tim. That just makes you more human." Okay. That leads me to two follow-up questions. One: why are boogers and body odor the defining characteristics of being human? And two: how did I get dehumanized? What happened to diminish my humanity so much that people need to be convinced again that I'm a human being? I don't know.

Actually, there are things that make people feel less than human. There are things that dehumanize us, so there's a big campaign out there around "being human." Stay human. Be human. Join Team Human. I'm for it, but what does it mean? What do you mean by "human?" Oh, we all know what human is, don't we? I'm not so sure. If we are all defining it for ourselves as we go along, then I don't know where we're going to wind up. We all know what it is to be human because we were all kindergartners once and everything I need to know I learned in kindergarten—be nice, share, don't yell, try not to hit ... But we weren't all in kindergarten together. Look, here's the big picture. This fall we are going to dig into humanization—*Humanize Me*. But do you know the model of humanity we will look at? We are going to look at Jesus as our model of humanity. We are quick to say, "I can't be like Jesus; I'm only human." But that's upside down. Jesus is the definition of humanity. Jesus is what it means to be fully, totally, uncompromisingly human.

We are all dehumanized exactly to the extent to which we are less than fully like Jesus. The distance between how I live now and how Jesus would live in my skin is exactly the measure to which I have been dehumanized to one degree or another. But the good news is, Jesus intends to humanize me again. Jesus is humanizing me. And if Jesus humanizes me and you and all of us, well, humanized people can humanize people. We can be a force for human flourishing in Colorado Springs and around the world. Are you starting to see it? I know this is kind of a big idea, but we're going to settle into it together for a good long run. If you invest in this series, you will see how Jesus is a humanizing Savior, and how following

Jesus means helping other people get humanized, too. So, let's jump in.

Luke 10, and the story of the Good Samaritan. This is actually going to be a frame we return to again and again through the entire series. This, more than any other story Jesus told, is our model for humanization of the dehumanized, and it happens to be the theme passage for all our efforts as a church to address poverty. This is it. Luke 10. A lawyer asks how to earn eternal life—eternal life, sounds good, how do I get some? Jesus asks him what he reads in the Bible. What Jesus is saying is, the Bible outlines for us what we would need to do to satisfy holiness, to justify ourselves and to earn eternal life. "So, you're a smart guy. What does it say?" The man sums up the Scriptures this way: "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 neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). Love God. Love neighbor. Sound easy? Not so fast, my friend. But, love God fully. All your heart. All your soul. All your strength and mind. All. And love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. Don't read by this and think it's easy and cute, okay? This is impossible. We are walking by a critical point very quickly, and it is this. You cannot earn your salvation by satisfying the law. It's impossible. Eternal life is a gift of God's grace when you throw yourself on the mercy seat of Christ, not when you stand on your accomplishments believing you have loved God and have loved neighbor to fulfill all righteousness. The man is way too confident in his spiritual prowess. But the lawyer, wanting to justify himself, asks a detail question: Who is my neighbor? And that gets us to the story.

"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 where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him'" (Luke 10:30–33). We don't want to be the priest; we don't want to be the Levite. We don't want to be the proudly religious who walk by the hurting. We want to be the Samaritan. The victim was dehumanized. Now, watch what the Samaritan does to wisely intervene and bring true help and healing. "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. 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 10:34-35). That's the model. That's our frame.

Then Jesus flips the question around. The man asked, "Who is my neighbor?" meaning "whom exactly am I required to give my love?" Jesus told this story, but instead of saying, "You see, every bleeding man on the street is your neighbor," Jesus asks: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (Luke 10:36). The point? Don't ask who your neighbor is that you have to be nice to; instead ask, "How can I be a neighbor to all those around me?" That's what "love your neighbor" is about. The lawyer answers correctly that the neighbor in the story, the one who loved, the one who used "neighbor" as a verb not a noun, and "neighbored" someone else, was the Samaritan. Right. Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." We want to go and do likewise.

But focus in with me on what we are supposed to go and do. What did the Samaritan do? How do you meaningfully help those who have suffered some form of dehumanization? How do you help the homeless? Really help them? How can the poor be relieved? How do you help anyone who is suffering, whose life is compromised and whose potential is limited by dehumanizing forces, experiences, mistakes, situations ... whatever? We think we know how to help, but often we don't; and sometimes our interventions do more harm than good. If poverty is dehumanizing, how do we alleviate poverty in Jesus' name? When we hear the word "poverty" we think it means lack of money. No mon', no fun. But when you actually go and ask people around the world who live on less than \$2 per day what poverty is, they don't say much about money. They tend to speak in terms of shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, social isolation and vulnerability. Throwing money at that is nothing but foolishness.

An organization called HOPE International works to alleviate poverty. It is a lot like what my wife Abigail does with TOLI, Touch of Love International. They work to alleviate poverty through small loans and business training to help people start their own small businesses. As they say, they alleviate global poverty through elevating human

dignity. HOPE International surveyed their clients in Rwanda. They asked "What is poverty?" Here are their top 10 answers: (1) Poverty is an empty heart. (2) Not knowing your abilities and strengths. (3) Not being able to make progress. (4) Isolation. (5) No hope or belief in yourself. (6) Knowing you can't take care of your family. (7) Broken relationships. (8) Not knowing God. (9) Not having basic things to eat. Not having money. (10) Poverty is a consequence of not sharing. (10) Lack of good thoughts. What is your response to this list? Money is number eight, and only included with the real thought which was about food. So, I have a couple of thoughts about a list like that. One is, money by itself doesn't solve a thing. And two is this: you and I suffer as much poverty as the so-called poor. You and I, living here in Colorado Springs in the United States of America, living in the wealthiest, most comfortable, most protected, most well-appointed lifestyle that has ever existed on planet earth, you and I suffer poverty, too. We are dehumanized, too.

What does the man in Jesus' story feel? The man who was beaten and robbed and left on the side of the road, what is he experiencing? He feels less than human. And what does the Samaritan do, the one Jesus tells to go and do likewise, to do what he did? He doesn't walk by like the priest and the Levite, but he doesn't go over and drop a five-dollar bill on him either. We have a real challenge here in Colorado Springs with homelessness. Being a downtown church, in the heart of the city, it's a big part of our lives. I'm glad for that, and I hope you are, too. But it's a challenge. On one hand we hear Jesus say, "give to everyone who asks of you" (Luke 6:30). So, we see people living on the street and we want to give. But what if dropping money on them is not helpful in the long term? That might not be the give that needs to be given. Bob Lupton in his book, *Toxic Charity*, said: "Give once and you elicit appreciation; give twice and you create anticipation; give three times and you create expectation; give four times and it becomes entitlement; give five times and you establish dependency." Charity can enslave people; it can become a poverty trap. Giving to a panhandler can actually do them more harm than good. What are we to do?

Well, I tell you, as a church we have decided to follow Jesus' teaching to "go and do likewise," to do it like the Good Samaritan did it. What did he do? He didn't walk by heartlessly. He stopped and assessed the situation. He had compassion and empathy. He saw the hurt man in his hurt

state and he saw him as human. He didn't see a problem; he saw a person. He didn't see trouble; he saw potential, and he moved toward him with mercy. That's what a neighbor does. Then he gained trust by helping a bit, as he was able. But watch what happens. The Samaritan picks the man up and takes him to another place. Remember? He takes him to an inn. The inn is where the man can heal. The inn is where the hurt, dehumanized man can feel human and safe again. In our terms, the Samaritan partners with an effective agency that is not creating dependency but empowering the needy to stand up again and feel dignity. For us, at First Pres, we partner with a lot of agencies, a lot of inns. I want to highlight our partnership with Springs Rescue Mission. Take a look at this video (Springs Rescue Mission video, "Spiritual Life at Springs Rescue Mission" available on Vimeo). The Mission Catering arm of Springs Rescue is housed in our industrial kitchen, and we recently celebrated the opening of Greenway Flats economic housing, a huge advance that some of our members made enormous sacrifices to create.

This feels a little bit like just the introduction this morning. This is a big topic. I'm excited to see what we learn, and more importantly what kind of a church we can be when we realize that Jesus is out to make us more human, and when we get more human, more like him, we can help others to be more human, too. Who can you be more human to? But as a last word, you too have been dehumanized. Jesus tells us to be like the Good Samaritan. Do you know why? Because the Good Samaritan is like Jesus. Jesus is the Lord who stops everything when He sees you in pain. Jesus is the Savior who comes into your life with healing oil and balm to dress your wounds. Jesus is the one who takes our wounds upon Himself. The Samaritan put the broken man on the beast of burden and carried him to the inn where he could be made whole. I want you to see, Jesus—not only is he the Samaritan, sacrificing from his resources, he is the beast of burden. The weight of all our sin, the sin of all humanity, was laid across His shoulders when He went to the cross. How can we be made human again? Only because Jesus, who is God, became human. He made Himself less than human so that you and I could be restored to humanity. This isn't ultimately about being good people; this is about being God's people, being the people saved by Jesus, and by Him made human again.

STUDY GUIDE
HUMANIZE ME • "Dehumanized"
Luke 10:25–37

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 10:25–37.

- 1) Reread verse 29. What about this man's question sounds familiar? What about this question mirrors our own society's attitude toward love of God and love of our neighbors?
- 2) Reread verse 30. This man didn't do anything wrong. He was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. When have you seen people unjustly stripped of their dignity or harmed in a similar way?
- 3) What systems/institutions exist in our world which regularly inflict this sort of harm on others? (Racism? Sexism? Etc.)
- 4) Reread verses 31–33. Jesus's audience would likely have had a strong dislike or distrust of the Samaritan people. What do you think about Jesus' decision to establish an "enemy" of the audience as the hero of the story?
- 5) Reread verses 34–35. How do the Samaritan man's actions serve to help the victimized man return to human flourishing?
- 6) How does this passage challenge you to think differently about what it means to be human?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

CityServe is October 5. This event provides a fantastic opportunity to join in the humanizing work of Jesus in our city. Consider serving at one of the sites with a friend! Go to firstprescos.org/cityserve for more information.

IN: Connect with Each Other

Who in your life needs to be restored to the type of flourishing life which Jesus offers? Take a moment to pray for them.