



WHO

Is Your Neighbour?

By Gael McInnes

Who is your neighbour?

The person who lives next door, of course! Yes and no. 'What do you mean?' I hear you ask. Let me share an experience I had.

It was midnight, a clear moonlit summer's night. The hood of my sports car was down, and I was only 10km from home. My friend and I were returning from an afternoon with family. Traffic was sparse and the car was purring along beautifully, or so I thought, when suddenly the engine gave a splutter and stopped. 'Oh no!' I exclaimed, looking at the petrol gauge. I instantly knew why. 'Now what?' my friend asked anxiously.

Knowing the area, I said I would walk to the nearest town. I knew where the taxi stand was and I could go and get petrol, but I'd be away for ages. I asked my friend if she wanted me to put the hood of the car up, as if a soft top was any protection. 'No', she said, 'just leave me the wheel brace!'

Taking the torch, I started out along the dark stretch of motorway. Shortly after, a car pulled up alongside and enquired if that was my car back there. 'Hop in', the driver said, 'I'll drop my family off first and then help you get petrol'. After taking his

family home, which was at the next town, he took a 2L petrol can from his garage and away we went. This man was new to the district. The nearest after-hours petrol was 20 km away and you could only use 50c coins! The man filled the can and paid for it himself, refusing my contribution.

One and a half hours later we arrived back at my car, and to my surprise I saw a station wagon parked in front of my car and a man leaning up against it chatting to my friend. This man had a sleeping wife and children in his wagon, and had stopped to offer help just after I had left. He said he needed the break and offered to stay until my return.

Once my car was going again, my 'motorway hero' wouldn't take any money from me. When I thanked him, he simply said, 'Do a good deed for a motorist sometime', and he was gone.

Both these men were our heroes that night. They gave their time in such a generous way and I am forever grateful.

Who is your neighbour? Anyone, of any race, creed, or social background who is in need.

How many times have you stood back, or 'rubber-necked' at an incident or accident, discussing the situation, not offering to help, not wanting to get involved, or just curious about someone else's demise? How many times have you 'passed by on the other side' when you have seen someone in need?

The Christian's guide to life¹ tells us what to do. Someone asked Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' He told a story about a traveller who was attacked and beaten by robbers, and how some priests and other people saw him but walked on. In contrast, another individual, who was considered 'not a nice kind of person', demonstrated compassionate love and helped the traveller.² We are also told 'do to others as you would

have them do to you',³ and to 'love each other'.⁴ Jesus loved us enough to give his life for us.

News items often interview the heroes who have pulled people out of burning cars and houses or people who have acted bravely. Last year in Auckland, a man gave his life when he courageously stepped in to help a woman who was being attacked. Television news regularly profiles a 'good person', and local community newspapers also have awards for people like this. It is instructive for us to take note of why they have been nominated: for selfless service to others.

We might not have to die for someone, but there are other ways to practice loving your neighbour: being a good listener, giving a helping hand to the elderly person struggling with the groceries, encouraging someone who is in a despondent mood, visiting a sick neighbour or friend, taking a meal to a grieving family, or giving of your time, skills and money to a school, neighbourhood, or community project. Volunteers are needed for many of our community support groups. A good place to start is to help your own family and friends.

Who is your neighbour? Wherever you live, needy people are close by. You might be the next person in need of help.

Notes

¹ Jesus' teachings in the New Testament.

² Luke 10:25-37.

³ Luke 6:31.

⁴ John 15:9-17.



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