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OTHERS!

Through a crack in the wall, a mouse watched the farmer and his wife open a package. The mouse wondered what delicious food might be in the package. But when he saw it was a *mousetrap*, he was devastated!

Rushing out to the farmyard, he proclaimed the warning: “There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!”

The chicken clucked, scratched, raised her head and said, “Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is of great concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it.”

The mouse turned to the pig and told him about the mousetrap. The pig sympathized and said, “I am so very sorry Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it. Be assured that you are in my prayers.”

The mouse turned to the cow and told her about the trap. She said, “Wow! Mr. Mouse, I’m sorry for you. But it’s no skin off my nose.”

Dejected, the mouse returned to face the mousetrap alone. That very night a sound was heard throughout the house—like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey. The farmer’s wife rushed to check things out. In the darkness she did not see that it was a poisonous snake whose tail had been caught in the trap. The snake bit the farmer’s wife and she developed a serious fever.

It is widely believed you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup. So, the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup’s main ingredient. But the condition of the farmer’s wife worsened. Friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock.

To provide food for them, the farmer butchered the pig. Unfortunately, the farmer’s wife did not recover and, in a few days, died. There were so many people that came for her funeral, the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide meat for all of them.

SO:

The next time you hear that someone else is facing a problem and think it doesn’t concern *you*, remember that when one of us is threatened, **WE ALL MAY BE AT RISK!**

(If any are critical of using a make-believe story to illustrate a point, we should keep in mind the Bible itself does the same. In Judges 9:8-15 we read of trees talking to one another, carrying on a debate as to whether the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine, or the bramble should be chosen as king!)

Political upheaval in an oil producing country, though far away, can cause the price of gasoline to soar in the USA!

As gasoline prices rise, the price of consumer goods grows higher, because of transportation costs.



Bad weather in Florida can devastate crops, causing the price of fruits and vegetables to rise even in states far away.

If drought hinders crops in mid-western states, it costs more to feed cattle, and the price of meat is adversely affected.

A plane grounded because of a storm in one city, can impact the traffic flow at another part of the country, though the weather there may be perfect.

A massive oil spill, though far out in the ocean, can eventually drift to shore, contaminating fish, killing birds, and devastating tourism.

Back in the 1960s when the economy was in a slump, President Lyndon Johnson went before the television cameras and said, in effect: the American people should go out and spend some money. If they needed to buy something, if they had been planning to buy something, to go **DO IT!**

Of course, running up a lot of debt on a credit card, spending money foolishly, makes no sense. But the other extreme of hoarding money, can hurt the overall economy. I am certainly no expert regarding all the inner workings of a complex economy, but it is not difficult to understand this: If no one *buys*, then no one *sells*. If no one sells, employees are not needed, and those jobs become non-existent.

Consider this:

In any given day a **\$20** bill can purchase **\$100** worth of goods—*if it continues to change hands:*

Early one morning a young man is paid **\$20** to mow a neighbor’s lawn. He then uses the **\$20** for a haircut. The barber spends the **\$20** for gas in his car. The gas station owner buys a shirt with the **\$20**. That night, the man at the clothing store goes to church and puts the **\$20** in the offering. **SO: \$20** became (as it were) **\$100!** People all along the chain benefited—even the church!

As Christians, we look to *God* to supply “our daily bread.” Yet it is *people*—all kinds of people—who gather the grains, *people* mix the dough, *people* do the baking, and *people* drive delivery trucks! Some of these may not be living for God, yet *all* become part of God’s provision.

If our house is on fire, we are not concerned whether the fireman who puts out the fire is a saint or sinner, black or white, Protestant or Catholic, Republican or Democrat. If we are in a serious car accident, when a paramedic comes to help, we will not question what denomination he belongs to! A hospital physician receives an emergency victim and works to save life—regardless of religion, race, creed, color, or political persuasion.

“No man is an **island**” is a famous line that has come down to us from a poet and renowned Church of England preacher, John Donne (1572-1631). What affects one, often involves others. Understanding this principle can help us better understand the following verses:

“Be loving toward *all men*” (1 Thes. 3:12).
 “Be patient with *all men*” (1 Thes. 5:14).
 “Pray for *all men*” (1 Tim. 2:1).
 “Show humility to *all men*” (Titus 3:2).
 “Pursue peace with *all men*” (Heb. 12:14).
 “Honor *all men*” (1 Peter 2:17)

A poet, Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911), expressed it this way:

**Let me live in a house
 by the side of the road
 Where the *race* of men
 go by—
 The men who are *good*
 and the men who are
bad,
 As good and as bad as I.
 I would not sit in the
 scorner’s seat, nor
 hurl the cynic’s ban—**



**Let me live in a house by the side of the road, and be a friend to
 MAN.**

Directly or indirectly, all kinds of people—saints *and* sinners—have a part in what happens on planet earth. Christians are not to be “*unequally yoked* together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14), but if we tried to avoid *any* association or contact with unbelievers, as Paul worded it, “then you would need to *go out of the world*” (1 Cor. 5:10).

Jesus, our example, was “holy, harmless, undefiled, *separate from sinners*” (Heb. 7:26). But being “separate from sinners” did not mean He had nothing to do with them, or that He did not reach out to them. He was called “a friend of *sinners*” (Matt. 11:19) and said of His own mission on earth: “I am not come to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance” (Matt. 9:10-13).

Tax collectors (called “publicans” in the King James Version) were often despised, so it probably came as a shock when Jesus said that tax collectors—and harlots—would enter the kingdom before *self-righteous* people! (Matt. 21:31).

We may not agree with how some of our tax money is spent. Yet, *overall*—because all kinds of people pay taxes—we all share in benefits. People who do not drive a vehicle may pay taxes to build a highway. How does this benefit *them*? It can benefit them because trucks will use the highway to bring goods they *do* use.

Some time ago, a man said to me: “My wife and I have no children; yet we have paid taxes so the children of *others* can go to school. We *want* them to be educated and get good jobs—they will be paying *our* Social Security some day!”

As we consider **OTHERS**, this includes *children*—something even the disciples did not understand at one point. People brought little children to Jesus, desiring that he lay his hands on them and pray, but “the disciples rebuked them.” Jesus said, “Let the little *children* come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt. 19:13, 14).

In Sunday School, when I was a boy, we used to sing:

**Jesus loves the little children,
 All the children of the world,
 Red and yellow, black and white,
 All are precious in his sight,
 Jesus loves the little children of the world.**



In 1970, Ray Stevens wrote and recorded a popular award-winning song: *Everything is Beautiful in its Own Way*. It begins with children (including his two daughters) singing *Jesus Loves the Little Children*, and then:

**Everything is beautiful in its own way.
 Like a starry summer night
 Or a snow-covered winter's day.
 And everybody's beautiful in their own way.
 Under God's heaven
 The world's gonna find the way.**

I assume the words “*everything* is beautiful” (and by extension, “*everybody’s* beautiful”) came from Ecclesiastes 3:11: “[God] has made *everything beautiful* in its time.”

Can we find some beauty in everybody, despite their flaws? Have we not all made mistakes and done things we later regretted? Should we be quick to judge and condemn another when we have not “walked a mile in his moccasins”? Considering someone’s background may not excuse his current behavior, but it can help us better understand it.

Suppose we are **right** on an issue—whether it be religious, political, or something else—and the other person is **wrong**. We will not help that other person by name calling, insulting him and making an enemy (cf. Matt. 5:25). “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).



In the children’s story *The Sun and the Wind*, there was a debate about who was strongest. The Wind claimed he could prove he was the strongest by blowing the coat off a man who walked on the road below. So, the Sun slipped behind a cloud and Mr. Wind blew like a tornado! But the harder the Wind blew, the tighter the man held on to his coat.

Then it was the Sun’s turn. He came out from behind the clouds and smiled kindly on the man. Presently the warm loving rays of the Sun caused the man to pull off his coat. The Sun had proved that the power of love and kindness is *stronger* than fury and force!

When I was in my early 20s, I had a program that aired five days a week on KBIF, a Fresno radio station. A regular listener to the program invited me to come visit him. When I had some difficulty finding his house, I pulled my car over and asked a couple teenage boys on bikes if they knew where Mr. Lewis lived. “Oh, you mean ‘Ole Crazy Man Lewis’? Sure, we know where he lives!” It ended up I was only a few houses away.

It was a (somewhat) poor area of town, and a portion of the yard at the Lewis’ house was loaded with discarded appliances and what appeared to be junk. But “Ole Crazy Man Lewis” was a wonderful man, had a heart for God, and believed in helping **OTHERS**.

If **anyone** had a problem with an appliance, chances are he had the needed part, along with a willingness to fix it. There would

have been nothing wrong if he charged for what he did, but he did it *freely* as a good neighbor.

We know from Scripture that we are *saved* by **grace**—*not* works (Eph. 2:8, 9). But works of kindness are *often* commended in the Scriptures: giving a cup of water, going the second mile, helping the poor, having compassion, showing mercy. One of the reasons for believers to assemble together is to encourage one another to “good works” (Heb. 10:24, 25).

If we care about **OTHERS**—if we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit those in prison, even those who are *least*—Jesus said we have done it unto **HIM** (Matt. 25:35-40).

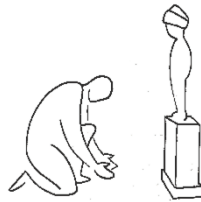
Years ago, the pastor of a church in Utah shared an incident with me. Though his church was in Utah, he was not a Mormon. In fact, *he preached against Mormonism!*

In addition to pastoring, he worked as a meatcutter at a local market. Sadly, one day he had a stroke. He was unable to work or preach for nine months. During this time, the Mormon Church in his community stepped in to provide help for him and his family, until he could get back on his feet.

Clearly, these Mormons—helping someone in need, without *bias*—were following the teachings of Jesus (Luke 6:27-36). This would not indicate they were doctrinally right on “everything.” But they were right on *this*, and for this should be commended. They were willing to reach out to others—even those who held a different belief.

Jesus said, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them” (Lk. 6:32).

There is an ancient story about a man who wanted to find the *true* God. He collected a bunch of idols and put them in a sack. As he walked down the street he tripped and all were broken—except *one*. He figured this must be the one true god. He set it up and began to worship it.



Then a **cat** came along and knocked it over. So, he figured the *cat*—being more powerful—must be god!

But then a **dog** came along and chased the cat off. So, he worshipped the *dog*.

When his **wife** saw him worshipping the dog, she threw a broom at the dog and it fled. He then decided his *wife* must be god!

He put her upon a pedestal and began to worship her! Being overcome with this attention, she fainted. As she fell into his arms, she said, “Oh my god!” The man thought she was talking about *him!* So, he concluded that **HE** must be god!

It is a fact: the “god” many people serve is **SELF**.

Years ago, I knew a pastor in Texas who led a neighbor girl to Christ. I am sure his desire would have been for her to attend his church. But because his church was small, he realized a larger church with more young people could provide better fellowship. He recommended a different church for her—*not his own*.

Unlike this pastor, some religious leaders develop a self-centered attitude. It happened even in the early church. John wrote: “Diotrephes, who loves to have the **preeminence**...does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church” (3 John 9, 10).

As a young man, my desire to travel and preach the gospel, became possible because pastors invited me to come hold meetings in their churches. Had they been self-centered, like Diotrephes, this would not have happened. Because they were open to someone else’s ministry, they gave me an opportunity to develop and gain experience in the Lord’s work.

At the time of Jesus, Jewish people acknowledged the scripture that said to “**love** your *neighbor*” (Lev.19:18). But—as some supposed—it was alright to **hate** their *enemy*. Jesus referred to this absurdity:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor *and hate your enemy*.’ But *I* say to you, *love* your enemies, *bless* those who curse you, *do good* to those who hate you” (Matt. 5:43, 44).

A man asked Jesus: “And **who** is my neighbor?” (Lk. 10:29). In response, Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan:

A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, was confronted by bandits who robbed him, stripped off his cloths, brutally beat him, leaving him naked and dying. A Jewish priest, and later a Jewish Levite—men who should have had compassion—passed by. Neither offered help. But when a “Samaritan” came upon the scene, he provided life-saving mercy. This illustrated what it truly means to be a “neighbor” (Luke 10:29-37).

Jesus would have been familiar with this dangerous road to Jericho, having traveled it a number of times. It was notorious as a hiding place for bandits as it passed through a very rugged area of mountains and cliffs.

Located on this ancient route is a cliff-hanging, Greek Orthodox monastery, carved into the sheer rock wall. It would have been in this area that the good Samaritan showed mercy to the dying man. Near the monastery is a cave which, according to a tradition, Elijah used as a hiding place when Jezebel threatened to kill him.



I know this area firsthand. In 1987, my wife and I, along with another couple, hiked down into this rugged ravine, called “Wadi Qelt,” to visit the monastery. We were warmly welcomed, but communication was limited because of the difference in language.

For Jesus to tell of a **Samaritan** who showed mercy on the road to Jericho—and a **Jewish** priest and **Jewish** Levite who did *not*—certainly challenged the racist bias of the Jews “who had no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9).

The hatred was deeply-rooted and of long standing. After the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the area was resettled with foreigners from Babylon and other places, which resulted in a racially mixed population that became known as Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24). Eventually they became worshippers of the God of Israel, adopted the five books of Moses, and believed in a coming Messiah (John 4:25).

When the Jews were rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, they offered to help. “Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhad-don king of Assyria” (Ezra 4:2). But they were rejected by the Jews who considered them inferior half-breeds and heretics.

The Samaritans subsequently erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. Their belief that this was a sacred mountain was based on the words of Moses: “...you shall put the blessing on **Mount Gerizim**” (Deut. 11:29). As the (Samaritan) woman at the well said to Jesus: “Our fathers worshipped on **this mountain** [Gerizim], and you Jews say that in **Jerusalem** is the place where one ought to worship” (John 4:20). It was a long-lasting debate.

Jews from Galilee who passed through Samaria to worship in Jerusalem were commonly mistreated. On one such occasion, James and John wondered if they should call fire (lightning) down from heaven to consume them (Luke 9:51-56). This may be why Jesus called James and John “Sons of *Thunder*” (Mark 3:17).

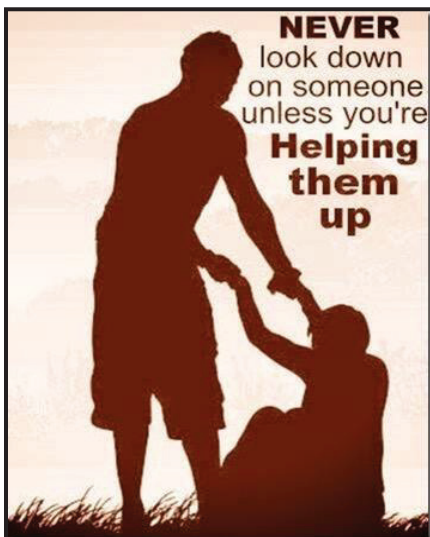
For Jesus, reaching out to “**OTHERS**” included the despised Samaritans (see John 4:4-26; Luke 17:16; Acts 1:8; 8:5, etc.).

Jesus addressed a parable to people who trusted in *themselves* that they were righteous, yet despised **OTHERS** (Lk. 18:9).

Just think how better the world would be if everyone practiced the Golden Rule, commonly phrased as: “Do unto **OTHERS** as you would have them do unto you” (cf. Matt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31)!

The Golden Rule message makes sense and is easily understood. It is far more fruitful than any complicated theological discourse by Dr. Daniel Dryasdust on topics like: “The Symbolic Significance of the Knotholes on Noah’s Ark,” or “How Many Warts will the Antichrist Have on His Left Toe?” or “The Rise and Fall of Hitler’s Mustache”!

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition...let each esteem **OTHERS** better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of **OTHERS**” (Phil. 2:3, 4; 1 Cor. 10:24).



There is an interesting story about the famous London Bridge that once spanned the River Thames in **England**—but is *now* in **Arizona**!

Purchased by Robert McCulloch, developer of Lake Havasu City, the exterior granite blocks were disassembled, numbered, transported to the United States, and reassembled. The project, completed in 1971, became an Arizona tourist attraction which, by some accounts, is second only to the Grand Canyon.

While at Lake Havasu some years ago, I was pleased to see a monument about William Booth—how it was under a portion of *this* bridge (well over a century before, when it was still in *London*!) that he witnessed alcoholics, derelicts, poor and homeless people living in dire straits, prompting him to found the Salvation Army.



When William Booth was advanced in age, for the first time in his life, he was unable to attend the Salvation Army Convention in London. He sent a telegram to be read at the opening session that was attended by thousands. The message was short—*one word*—but very meaningful: “**OTHERS.**”

Tennessee Ernie Ford (1919-1991) was known for hit songs like “Sixteen Tons” and “Mule Train.” But he is also remembered for his record albums in which he sang many old hymns of the church: “The Ninety and Nine,” “In the Garden,” “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” “Let the Lower Lights Be Burning,” and “**OTHERS**”:

**Lord, help me live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for OTHERS.**

**Help me in all the work I do
To ever be sincere and true
And know that all I do for you
Must needs be done for OTHERS.**

**OTHERS, Lord, yes, OTHERS
Let this my motto be;
Help me to live for OTHERS
That I may live like Thee.**

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