

# A Biblical Witness for Interfaith Friendship

There are many instances in scripture in which persons of different faiths encounter one another. While many of these encounters do not represent models that we should follow, many others do as they point to a consistent Biblical ethic. To begin, in the Hebrew Bible we read that we are to care for the marginalized of society: the foreigner (who was almost always of a different faith), the widow, and the orphan (Deut. 10:17-19). One of the most notable examples of a positive interfaith encounter is the story of Elijah and the widow in Sidon (1 Kings 17). Next, in the New Testament, Jesus crosses nearly every social boundary to bridge gaps between the insiders and "outsiders"—calling the religious back to the priority of love. Examples of this include Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well (John 4), his stinging sermon to his home synagogue (Luke 4), and his sharp criticism of those who judge others' faith by a person's identity vis-à-vis that which is in their hearts (Luke 10). Finally, our missional calling to be the presence of Christ in the world calls us to authentic friendship with those we deem "other" just as Jesus modeled. Whether through Paul in Athens, or through Jesus in Samaria, we are given glimpses of honest, respectful, loving behavior.

Undergirding all of these examples we are left with the foundational commandment for a biblical ethic: In both the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament our greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Leviticus 19:18 "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

What does it mean to love our neighbor? And who is our neighbor? What happens, then when your neighbor is a Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or other faith? Love, in all cases, calls for honesty, integrity, respect and hospitality. Will you love your neighbor?

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