

# Lesson plan

## The Good Samaritan



This lesson plan gives students an opportunity to imagine what it is like to come across a stranger who needs help. By exploring how they might feel, think and react in such a situation, students can prepare themselves for dealing with a similar emergency in the future.

The lesson is divided into three phases that could run continuously in one sitting, or be covered in short bursts over a few days. In each phase, more information about the situation is revealed and students discuss and reflect on what they hear.

### Age group

11–16, over 16s and adults

### Timings

Phase 1	30 minutes, plus optional writing activity
Phase 2	30 minutes
Phase 3	25 minutes, plus writing activities

### Learning outcomes

- > Students will learn to put themselves in the position of others and empathise with someone else's thoughts, feelings and actions
- > Students will be encouraged to explore and express, both orally and in writing, the influences and motivations for helping people in need.

## Phase 1

Ask students to imagine the following situation.

**A trainee priest has been studying the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Christian Bible.**

**It tells the story of a man who was robbed and left for dead by the roadside. A priest and another cleric passed by him. Neither stopped. But when a Samaritan saw the man, he nursed his wounds, took him to an inn on his horse and took care of him. The two men were from groups hostile to each other.**

**The trainee priest has been asked to give a talk about the parable to fellow students. On the way to the lecture hall, there is a man lying slumped in a doorway. He is moaning and coughing.**

Ask students what they think the trainee priest will do. Stop and help or carry on to the talk? Let students express their reactions briefly before moving on.

Invite them to think about similar situations that they have been in. Can they think of times when they had the chance to help someone? Did they help or not? Try not to dwell on easy moral judgements – that stopping to help is right and not stopping is wrong. Instead, focus on **what motivates us** to stop and help.

Ask them to consider why they did or didn't act. Make notes. How did they feel – unsure, indifferent, frightened, guilty, heroic, kind? What were they doing at the time – shopping, going to school, hanging out? Who were they with? What time of day was it and what was the weather like? Do they think it was in their character to behave as they did?

See if any of the students have an example of a time they helped someone for selfish reasons. This might be to have an excuse to miss something they didn't want to do anyway. Does it matter if your motivations are selfish, providing you help someone?

You could ask students to turn their notes into a short written piece for homework.

Now go back to the trainee priest's situation. Ask them to imagine they are the trainee priest – what would they do?

Invite students to write down a sentence expressing the thoughts, feelings and concerns the trainee priest might have. For example, "I don't know what to do or say", "It could be dangerous for me to approach him" or "I could get out of doing this talk if I stop and help him". Write up students' thoughts or ask them to pin their sentences on the board.

## Phase 2

Tell students that the situation in phase 1 happened in real life, many times over.

**During an experiment at Princeton University in the USA in 1973, a group of trainee priests were asked to give a talk to other students in another building. On their way there, one by one, the trainee priests came across a man slumped in a doorway. Some of them stopped to help, and some didn't.**

Ask students why they think some of the trainee priests stopped and some didn't. What factors do they think influenced their behaviour? Ask them to think back to phase 1 and the reasons they gave for helping or not helping.

In small groups or as a whole class, brainstorm possible factors that determined who stopped and who didn't. Ideas might include:

- > whether the trainee priest cared about the man
- > whether there were other people around who could help
- > whether they thought it was a trick
- > whether they knew first aid
- > whether they thought the man had been drinking or using drugs
- > how nervous they were about giving the lecture
- > whether they thought god would look after the man
- > whether they thought they would catch something

Then ask students to rank the factors with the most significant factor at the top and the least at the bottom. This exercise is about reaching a consensus as a group, but do make a note of strongly differing opinions.

Which factors are about the type of **person** we are (P) and which are about the **circumstances** we are in at the time (C)? Ask students to mark their lists like this:

- > whether the trainee priest cared about the man (P)
- > whether there were other people around who could help (C)

Are some factors hard to categorise? Mark them as (P/C)

Looking at their lists now, which do students think has the greater influence over whether or not we help a stranger – the type of person we are or the circumstances?

Now tell students more about the experiment.

**While half the trainee priests in the experiment had been asked to talk about the Good Samaritan parable, the other half were asked to talk about something completely different.**

**They had varying moral ideas and attitudes to their religion which suggested that some would be more likely to help the stranger, and do what they thought was morally right, than others.**

**Before the priests came across the stranger in the doorway, some had been told that they were late for their talk and should hurry. Others were told they had just enough time, and some were told they had plenty of time to get there.**

What do students think was the deciding factor? Do they think the subject of the talk they were about to give made a difference in terms of who stopped and who didn't? What about whether they were in a hurry or not, or what their attitude to helping others was?

### Phase 3

You can now reveal the results of the experiment.

**The researchers found that it made absolutely no difference that some of the trainee priests had been asked to talk about the Good Samaritan. Nor did the priests' moral or spiritual outlook affect the results. The only thing that made a difference was how much of a hurry the trainee priests were in.**

**Of those who had plenty of time, 63 per cent stopped**

**Of those who were in a moderate hurry, 45 per cent stopped**

**Of those who were in a great hurry, 10 per cent stopped.**

Are students surprised? Talk about what this experiment tells us about the reasons why people decide to stop and help a stranger. Are certain types of people more likely to help? Or is it the circumstances at the time that matter most?

Complete the story about the experiment.

**Many of the trainee priests who didn't stop to help the man in the doorway felt shaken up and worried when they arrived at the lecture hall to give their talk. They felt torn between wanting to help the man and being on time. The researchers concluded that this inner conflict – and not heartlessness – might explain why some trainee priests didn't stop.**

Talk about whether it is sometimes OK not to help someone. Or is it important for society that we all help, all the time? What if you might put yourself in danger if you help? What if you think the person doesn't deserve help?

Can it sometimes feel easier to walk away than to stop and get involved in someone else's problems? Are there some situations in which it might be difficult to help someone else? If so, when and why?

Are there some times when you are more likely to stop – for example if you are on your way to somewhere you do not particularly want to be? Might people sometimes offer help because they know they can then duck out of something else they don't want to do? Does this matter? Does it make a difference to the person needing help?

Change the situation to one after a disaster, where there is not one, but many people in need of help. How might that alter what people choose to do? No one can help everyone. So what happens?

Discuss the "Good Samaritan" law in France which makes it an offence not to help a fellow citizen in need, unless doing so would endanger the person helping. Do students think it should be illegal in the UK to avoid helping someone in need? Talk about real and hypothetical situations to help decide.

Look back at the factors students came up with in phase 2. Could some of the factors be overcome? Think about ways of preparing to be able to help someone in need.

- > Do we need confidence to help someone else?
- > Would having specific skills make a difference? What would they be?
- > Perhaps you aren't sure what to do or say and whether the person needs help. What could you say?
- > What's the worst that could happen – to you and to them?

## Writing activities

Round off the lesson plan with one of these writing activities to draw together what students have discussed and explored.

- > Imagine you're one of the trainee priests who didn't stop. Write a letter to the man in the doorway explaining your reasons for not stopping and expressing how you feel about it. Do you regret not stopping? Would you behave differently if something similar happened in the future?
- > Imagine you're the person slumped in the doorway. Write an inner monologue with your thoughts. How does it feel to be in need of help? How does it feel when people pass you by without asking if you're OK? Are you surprised by how many do? Why do you think they aren't stopping? Describe how it feels when a stranger does stop and help.

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## Note

Please note that the British Red Cross is a non-religious, non-political humanitarian organisation which welcomes people of all faiths and of none. Although the Good Samaritan story is a well known Christian parable, other faiths and belief systems convey similar ideas.

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This lesson plan was researched and written by Kristin Hulaas Sunde and produced in January 2007 and revised in November 2009.

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