

# 'Let's Just Take Care of Each Other,' Says Retired General

*The Wired Word for the Week of February 3, 2019*

## In the News

A middle-aged white man was driving on the Capital Beltway. An older black man was on the side of the road, trying to fix a flat front tire. The driver, Anthony Maggert, immediately thought that he recognized the man who was stranded: retired Gen. Colin L. Powell.

"But no," Maggert thought, "it couldn't be. Out here, on the side of the road?"

Thinking that he ought to help the stranded driver whether he was the general or not, Maggert pulled over and walked toward the man on his prosthetic leg. Discovering that he was right, he said, "You're Gen. Colin Powell." The man replied, "Yes, I am."

At that point, 42-year-old Maggert realized that he was in the presence of one of his favorite leaders. According to *The Washington Post*, Maggert had read all of Powell's books, and he had watched him on television and been impressed by Powell's grace under pressure. And when he joined the military and served 23 years, Powell became a role model for him. When Maggert served three tours in Iraq and two tours in Afghanistan, losing his leg to a flesh-eating bacteria, he found himself thinking often about Powell.

Maggert got out the lug wrench and began to help Powell with his tire. The two of them chatted about Afghanistan as they worked together. "Such a gentleman," Maggert said of 81-year-old Powell, who had gone from military service to work as U.S. Secretary of State. After the wheel was fixed, Powell left for an exam at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and Maggert went on his way.

The encounter lasted just a few minutes, with one man helping another. "Why not?" said Maggert to *Fox and Friends*. "Why not take just a second out of your day to just help somebody else out?" But the act of neighborly assistance stood in stark contrast to the acrimony being felt in Washington just a few miles away, with the federal government partially closed, politicians battling along partisan lines, and pundits on television shouting at each other.

While some might say that Maggert was a "Good Samaritan" to Powell, others would argue that such a label should be applied only to helpers who cross religious or cultural lines to provide assistance. Both of these men served in the U.S. military, and Maggert was a big admirer of the general before their encounter. Still, Maggert crossed generational and racial lines in order to be a good neighbor to Powell in a time of need.

After helping with the tire, Maggert wrote Powell a message, calling him "an inspiration, a leader and statesman." Powell responded in a public Facebook post: "Thanks, Anthony. You touched my soul and reminded me about what this country is all about and why it is so great. Let's stop screaming at each other. Let's just take care of each other. You made my day."

In another story in *The Washington Post*, writer Steven Petrow describes how he was waiting in a long line at his favorite bakery, a shop in North Carolina which makes amazing scones. Watching the people ahead of him pluck the delicious scones out of the glass case, he worried that the bakery would run out. But when he got to the counter, he saw that there was one left, so he pointed and said, "I'll take that."

No sooner had he spoken than the guy behind him shouted, "Hey, that's my scone! I've been waiting in line for 20 minutes!" Petrow knew that the man had been waiting, but a line is a line.

Petrow could have declared to the man, "Sorry, it's mine!" He had every right to do so. Instead, he asked him, "Would you like half?" The man was shocked into silence, but after a moment he accepted the offer and made a suggestion of his own, "Why don't I buy another pastry and we can share both?" Then they sat down on a nearby bench to share their pastries.

The two men had almost nothing in common, in terms of jobs, ages, political views or marital status. But they shared a moment of connection and simple kindness. "I felt happy," says Petrow, "and, frankly, wanted more of that feeling."

More on this story can be found at these links:

A Chance Encounter Between Colin Powell and a Disabled Veteran Left Them Both Inspired About America. *The Washington Post*

'Selfless Service': Wounded Afghanistan Vet Helps Colin Powell Fix Flat Tire. *Fox News*

How a 'Kindness Contagion' Improves Lives, Especially Now. *The Washington Post*

### **Applying the News Story**

Loving our neighbors is difficult, especially when the people around us do not share our race, religion or culture. Christians are challenged to find ways to help neighbors in need, show kindness, and make connections.

### **The Big Questions**

1. What risks did Anthony Maggert take to assist Colin Powell? When have you taken a risk to help a neighbor in need?
2. "Let's stop screaming at each other," wrote Powell. "Let's just take care of each other." Where do you see people screaming at each other today, instead of taking care of each other? What factors make it easier to scream than to help?
3. Some people find it difficult to assist a stranger of another generation, race, religion or culture, while others don't. What might be some reasons for each?
4. Where do you see concrete examples of people showing kindness and making connections with people unlike themselves?
5. What message do we send the world when we love our neighbors as ourselves? How does this make the Christian faith attractive to others?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **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.* (For context, read 19:11-18.)

In a series of divine speeches from God to Moses in Leviticus 19, commandments are given about holiness in social ethics. In echoes of the Ten Commandments, God says, "You shall not

steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by my name" (vv. 11-12).

In business dealings, "You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning" (v. 13). God knows that powerful employers are more than happy to withhold the wages of vulnerable laborers for as long as possible, so this practice is expressly forbidden. With regard to the disabled, God prohibits attitudes or actions that discriminate against the deaf and the blind. Also forbidden are unjust judgments, partiality toward the poor, and deference to the powerful. Slander is prohibited, as are hatred, vengeance and the bearing of grudges.

Only two of these commandments are written in a positive manner: "you shall reprove your neighbor" (v. 17) and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The first of these is an instruction to correct neighbors when they err and hold them accountable; the second is a commandment that identifies love as the organizing principle of all of the other commandments. A person who follows the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" is simply not going to steal, lie, defraud, slander, hate, or bear a grudge.

**Questions:** Where do you see a connection between holiness and love? How is love an organizing principle for commandments that prohibit stealing, lying, defrauding, etc.?

**Proverbs 14:21**

*Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.* (No context needed.)

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings about how to live the good life. Some of the sayings include positive examples, such as "A faithful witness does not lie" (v. 5), while others describe the consequences of bad behavior, "The house of the wicked is destroyed" (v. 11). Other sayings judge people "who despise their neighbors," and predict happiness for "those who are kind to the poor."

**Questions:** Why is it a sin to despise your neighbors? Where have you found happiness in helping others, especially in being kind to the poor?

**Matthew 22:36-39**

*[A lawyer asked Jesus:] "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.'" (For context, read 22:34-40.)*

After entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus is put to the test by religious leaders called the Sadducees and the Pharisees. After the Sadducees ask him a question about the resurrection, the Pharisees ask him to name the greatest of the commandments in the law. Jesus responds by pointing them to the commandment in Deuteronomy 6:5 to "love the LORD your God," and then to the commandment in Leviticus 19:18 to "love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus concludes by saying, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (v. 40).

**Questions:** How do you see all the words of the Mosaic law and the prophets "hanging" on these two love commandments? Where do you find the commandment to love to be particularly challenging?

**Luke 10:36-37**

*[Jesus asked a lawyer:] "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell*

*into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (For context, read. 10:25-37.)*

Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which a Jewish man goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He falls into the hands of robbers who strip him, beat him, and go away. A Samaritan sees the injured man, bandages his wounds, brings him to an inn, and takes care of him. This surprises the Jews who are listening to Jesus' story, because they think of Samaritans as people who deserve only slurs and hateful language -- they are not seen as "neighbors."

Although we use the term "Good Samaritan" to describe anyone who puts time and effort into helping a person in need, the label Good Samaritan can particularly apply to someone of a different cultural caste who helps a person outside of that ethnic circle. The term applies to an outsider who helps an insider, not the other way around. If the parable were to be written today, it would feature a Christian being helped by a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, or even a Wiccan. The outsider status of the Samaritan is what makes the story so powerful, taking it to a new level.

**Questions:** When have you seen a person crossing cultural, ethnic or religious lines to help a person in need? What risks did they take? Why does Jesus honor such actions?

#### **For Further Discussion**

1. Paul writes that all the commandments "are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Romans 13:9). Do you think there are commandments that cannot be summed up in the love commandment? If so, where are they, and what purpose do they serve?
2. Can churches act as "Good Samaritans," in addition to individuals? What would it look like for a congregation to cross ethnic or cultural lines to help people in need?
3. A neighbor is not defined by race or religion, according to Jesus, but is anyone who shows mercy (Luke 10:37). When have you been helped by a person very different from yourself, and what impression did it make on you?
4. In this era of political polarization, how can Christians do a better job of making connections, showing kindness, and caring for others?

#### **Responding to the News**

Keep your eyes open for people in need, especially those of a different race, religion or culture. Be a good neighbor by taking a concrete action that shows mercy to them.

#### **Prayer**

Creator God, we thank you for this world and all its peoples. Help us to take care of each other, in the name of your Son Jesus. Amen.