

# Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

**#88 • Season 3 • Episode 27**

*3/18/2026*

# The Good Samaritan

# Our Hosts

**Janet Cheyne McMahon** is a lover of family, dogs, nature, travel, books, and music. Born south of the Mason-Dixon line, she left after 9 months for parts north, landing eventually in Michigan, which will always be “where I’m from.”

Love of learning led Jan to a Bachelor of Arts (History, Political Science) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (Go Blue), and a Master of Arts (Library and Information Science) at the University of South Florida. Amid all that, studied for a time with Rob at Colorado State University, a pivotal time in their lives.

Worked at the U of M-Dearborn Library, and then The Salvation Army Florida Divisional Headquarters, with the greatest reward being in serving as the Divisional Librarian. A librarian is who Jan is “in my soul.”

Jan and Rob have made our home in Florida since 1983, and live now in retirement with their dog, Skye, who makes it all the best adventure. They travel as much as possible, spending time in nature and in diverse places on this amazing planet. It has all been, and continues to be a fascinating journey, with hope of making a difference, in small ways, by being brave enough to speak and act on behalf of others.

**Rob McMahon** is a native Michigander, born in Saginaw and raised in the suburbs of Detroit. Rob attended Michigan State University, graduating in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He did graduate studies at the University of Michigan and the University of South Florida. Rob is retired, having spent 36 years in public education teaching both high school chemistry and biology and middle school science. He worked as a total quality management trainer for the Pinellas County School District and served four years as the president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association. Rob cofounded a non-profit total quality management training center, The Learning Co-op, for Teacher Unions interested in applying the W. Edwards Deming continuous improvement principles to their day-to-day operations. He worked with teacher unions in Colorado, Maryland, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas and Michigan. He also worked in a similar capacity with Jim Shipley & Associates. In retirement Rob has written a series of science related children’s books, and enjoys traveling with his wife, Jan, and their Black Labrador Retriever, Skye.

**Deanna Cheyne**, born in St. John’s, Newfoundland, earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Toronto (1996), studying with such luminaries as Elmer Eisler, Doreen Rao, Greta Kraus, Lois Marshall, and Rosemarie Landry.

Dee taught music at Mississauga Christian Academy, served as music director for Meadowvale Bible Baptist Church (Mississauga, Ontario), served as Assistant Divisional Music Director for The Salvation Army in Florida, is a former member of Tampa’s Master Chorale, and, for the past 18 years, has been a public school teacher.

Dee has visit 36 of the 50 U.S. states, and 12 countries. Her favorite destinations include France, Prague, New Orleans, National Parks, & Hawaii.

Dee & Jim live in Florida with Brigus (Golden Retriever) and Pip (Teacup Yorkie).

**James Cheyne**, born in Galesburg, Illinois, earned a Bachelor of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from Michigan State University (1978); and a Master of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign (1981), studying with David Liptak, Salvatore Martirano, and Ben Johnston.

Jim has served as music director for The Salvation Army in Central Illinois & Eastern Iowa, Orlando Area Command, and the Florida Division, served as a pastor with The Salvation Army, and was a public school teacher for 17 years.

In travel so far, Jim has visited 50 states and 27 countries. His favorite travel destinations include National Parks, New Orleans, Newfoundland, Argentina, Prague, & France.

Jim continues to write music and support Dee’s musical endeavors, and cooks whenever absolutely necessary. Jim & Dee live in Florida with their dogs Brigus & Pip.



L-R: Brigus, Jim, Deanna, Skye, Jan, Rob.  
Inset: Pip

This transcript of the podcast, Making Our Way is housed at  
[cheynemusic.com/podcast/transcripts](http://cheynemusic.com/podcast/transcripts).  
©2026 by James Cheyne, all materials, unless otherwise noted.  
All rights reserved.

# The Good Samaritan

#88 - Season 3; Episode 27

3/18/2026

Host: Jim.

| Jim discusses the parable of the Good Samaritan, why so many get it wrong, and why so many who say we get it wrong get it wrong. It's really quite easy, which could be the problem.

[Music]

**JIM:** Today we're talking about the Good Samaritan, so the obvious starting point is the O.J. Simpson Trial of the Century. We remember that, right? Judge Lance Ito - he collected hourglasses. He had an assortment of them at the bench, and anytime there was a sidebar discussion, he'd pick out one that was just the right size and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, we discuss your point until this runs out, and no longer." So, inspired by Judge Ito, I decided to start collecting hourglasses. And my first purchase was at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England, in 1996. They have a gift store there with several hourglasses and I bought one called Sermon, which runs for 15 minutes. 15 minutes for a sermon. That might be the optimal time for a sermon in the United Kingdom, but not in the United States. The average sermon length in the United States is 37 minutes. Studies say listener engagement falls off significantly after 15 to 20 minutes, so 37 minutes is just too long for a sermon. The rule of thumb is this: end a sermon five minutes before the audience loses interest. Good luck guessing when that is. A friend of mine at the University of Illinois, George Bell, used to say this, "If you haven't struck oil in 10 minutes, stop boring." I like that.

Here's a story from Star Lake in New York, a music camp where Erik Leidzén, the composer, was the special guest, and the special guests were often invited to deliver the sermon on the final Sunday morning. So, Erik Leidzén steps to the pulpit and says this. "You know what you ought to do. Go home and do it." And then he sat down. Sermon over. I heard that story from Eileen Hookstad, who was there. "You know what you ought to do. Go home and do it." He said everything that needed to be said, and sat down. Feel free to share this story with your pastor this week.

Eight score and three years ago, Edward Everett spoke for over two hours at the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. Abraham Lincoln spoke for just over two minutes. Which one worked? Which one stuck? And you knew the answer the moment I said, "Eight score and three."

Suppose your job is to deliver a sermon about the Good Samaritan. How long should it last? 37 minutes? Jesus took less than one. So how is a preacher supposed to fill those other 36? I wanted to answer that, so to get ready for today's episode, I listened to somewhere between, oh 23 and 25, let's call it 24 sermons on the Good Samaritan. We meet the Good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10, and in some future episode, I'll give my argument for why Luke is the obvious place to find this story.

Beginning in verse 25.

*An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Luke says nothing about the man other than that he is a lawyer. And what do lawyers do? This expert in the law was tasked with interpreting, preserving, studying, and teaching the law, the Torah. Now, along comes Jesus, a new teacher, so this lawyer does exactly what Jesus and everyone there would expect him to do. He checks Jesus's credentials by asking him a question. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He addresses Jesus with respect and asks a necessary, uncontroversial question.

There's nothing contentious here, but this is where a lot of the sermons I listened to went off the rails. Two words triggered it: "lawyer" and "test." Preachers, I've noticed, love to depict this guy as a bad guy straight out of central casting. Arrogant. Proud. Self-righteous he is. Sure of his knowledge of the law. Sure of his rhetorical skills. Ready to stand up to this upstart would-be teacher. Trick him. Trip him up. Take him down in front of all these people. You can get a good 5 to 7 minutes out of lawyer bashing, and Jesus hasn't said a word yet.

Then he tests Jesus, or as the old King James put it, he tempted Jesus. Time to rattle off a few of those "don't tempt God" passages, and then accuse the lawyer of presence of malice.

Verse 26.

*He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"*

Preparing a sermon is a two-part process. Part one is Bible study, getting an understanding of what the text is saying. Part two is applying that understanding to the needs of the congregation, translating it into everyday life. And this takes time. Too many sermons are left until Saturday to write. Grab a passage, grab a book of sermon illustrations, maybe a book of inspirational topical quotations, mash them together, and bingo! you've got a sermon, or what we used to call a "Saturday Night Special." You might not have known this is how it's done sometimes, but I bet you've heard the results.

So Jesus begins.

*What is written in the law? What do you read there? He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer. Do this, and you will live." But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Now, those preachers who went off on this lawyer for testing Jesus now have a field day with him wanting to vindicate himself. "Oh, the audacity! The lack of self-awareness." Plus, they'll add a good 8 minutes here about how the law cannot be followed perfectly. Certainly not by this lawyer.

But none of that is in Luke. The lawyer is asking for clarification. Much of the law is directed at how Jewish people ought to act toward each other. But this conversation is being held at the crossroads of Asia Minor and Egypt and Mesopotamia, with Galileans to the north, and Samaritans to the north, and Phoenicians along the coast, and Nabataeans to the south,

nomadic people in the east, and the Romans are just all over the place. "Who is my neighbor?" is a very reasonable question. And with that question, the Bible study part of this sermon is over. And now comes the application part, the part that invites the lawyer and all who are listening to invest in the real message Jesus has.

Jesus replied,

*"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead."*

And this is where a lot of those would-be sermons accidentally turn into Bible studies. There might even be a PowerPoint here. "You can see on this map. Here's Jerusalem and here's Jericho. This is a very dangerous road, with twists and turns and caves, good places for robbers and thieves to lie in wait. They call it the 'Path of Blood.'" If a preacher didn't leave time for the application part of his sermon preparation, you're likely going to get a replay of his Bible study instead. And I keep using masculine pronouns here because all the sermons I found were delivered by men, which could be part of the problem.

But now, here comes a priest, and the real fun begins.

*"Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."*

Now what the lawyer and those listening knew, but what we might need to learn, is that Leviticus 21 restricts the priest's and the Levite's options. It's about ritual purity. If they are to perform their duties, they cannot come in contact with a dead body. And if they thought this victim was dead or might die soon, then touching him in any way at all would defile them. Jesus implies no shame on them for their actions. They did what was expected of them. It's the next guy that comes along who doesn't act as expected, and that is the point of this story. Still, preachers will trip over each other to call the priest and the Levite heartless, uncaring, and callous. Jesus says nothing like that.

In fact, Jesus is using a narrative technique here. We call it the rule of three, where points one and two are used to set up point three. Story writers use it - screenwriters, composers. Comedians live by it. "What are the three hardest things to say? One, I'm sorry. Two, I was wrong. Three Worcestershire sauce."

It's a ready set go. Ready? That's the priest. Set? That's the Levite. Go? That's verse 30.

*"But a Samaritan, while travelling, came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine, then put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'"*

I could spend, oh, 8 to 10 minutes, talking about the history between Judeans and Samaritans. The sermons I heard did. A disturbing number of them kept using the term "half-breeds." Of all the cultural groups and nationalities within a day's journey from where Jesus and this lawyer were standing, Jesus chose a Samaritan to make his point as sharp as possible.

It was just days before this conversation, one chapter earlier in print, that Jesus had been turned away from a Samaritan village for no reason other than that he was headed to Jerusalem. And James and John thought it a good idea to call down fire from heaven to consume that Samaritan village, stopped only by Jesus' rebuke.

If I were to do what other preachers have done and invent motives for people in this story, I might have the disciples look at each other here and say, "Whom did he say?"

And now that we're coming to the real point of this story, I'll set aside all those sermons I've heard on this matter, inflated as they are with diatribes against the lawyer and the priest and the Levite. Let's leave those where they lie to get to the real purpose of this narrative.

Point one was the Bible study. "What does the Law say?"

Point two was the application. "Then came a Samaritan."

And now point three, the invitation.

Jesus asks,

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"*

By this time the answer is unavoidable for the lawyer, for all who were listening then, for us now.

*He said, "The one who showed him mercy."*

See, "Who is my neighbor?" misses the point. Jesus here says something that is as powerful as the prophet Nathan did when he rebuked King David, cornered him into condemning an unnamed man, and then said to the king, "You are the man." In Jesus' hands, though, it's not rebuke, it's revelation. To the lawyer he says, "You, my friend, are the neighbor. To all you meet, to all those who cross your path, you are the neighbor."

*Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

Or, as Erik Leidzén might have said, "You know what you ought to do. Go home and do it."

And I see that my Sermon hourglass is just about empty. All that remains is for me to say, a Good Samaritan sermon left unsupervised, can easily grow into a 37 minute menace that leaves a congregation beaten and half dead. A good Good Samaritan sermon, however, like this one from Luke and Jesus, should clear a safe path for us to travel as we are Making Our Way.

Thank you for your company today.

Until next time.