

Love Your Neighbor

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?" He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live." But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.' What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?"

Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Lk. 10:25-37 (C.E.B.)

For the Children:

Do any of you have rules at your house? Maybe a rule about not running in the house or maybe washing your hands before you eat? What other rules do you have?

Have you ever heard of the Golden Rule? (*I doubt they have.*)

Well, you know what gold is right? It's really valuable.

The Golden Rule is a rule that is valuable because it helps us remember lots of other rules. Do you want to know what that rule is?

Treat people the same way you want to be treated.

Can you say it? Treat people the same way you want to be treated.

The Golden Rule is one of the rules Jesus tells us to follow, and it's really pretty simple, isn't it?

If you want someone to share a toy with you, you start by sharing a toy with them. It's not a promise that they will share theirs, but you show them how you want to be treated and hope they treat you that way, too.

Lots of times, the Golden Rule also helps us remember other rules. If you want someone to listen to you while you're talking, for example, you listen when other people are talking – so we don't need a rule about listening when people are talking – because if we follow the Golden Rule, we'll already be doing that!

It also works for rules like not running in the house – because we don't want someone to run into us when we're not looking. Or not throwing a ball inside because we don't want one of our things broken, so we don't do that to someone else.

Jesus is pretty smart to give us such a simple rule, isn't he?

Let's pray (repeat after me):

Dear Jesus, thank you for rules, even when we don't like the rules. Help us remember the Golden Rule, to treat others the same way we want to be treated. Amen.

For the Adults:

“But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Lk. 10:29). The legal expert wanted to prove that he was right.

Whenever I notice that line, I realize I'm not much different. I try to live by the poster I saw once in a school that said, “WHAT is right matters more than WHO is right.” Too often, however, I would rather prove that I'm right.

That's the dilemma for both the priest and the Levite in the story Jesus tells (Lk. 10:30-36). They both know they are right. Keeping themselves pure was an important part of their religious understanding (Nu. 19:11). The best thing may have been to help the man who was dying on the street, but they were more interested in proving they were right, or righteous.

It's curious that Jesus tells us about the man who stopped to help – but he never tells us anything about the man who is on the side of the road.

- I wonder if the priest would have stopped if it had been a fellow priest?
- Would the Levite have stooped down to help a fellow Levite?

I don't know that we have to know someone to help them; but it does make it easier to help. And because it's easier to love your neighbor if you know your neighbor we will be talking about the idea of neighboring for the next few weeks.

Neighboring is a movement that began in 2009. In his book, *The Art of Neighboring*, Dave Runyon tells the story of how the neighboring movement began. As he tells it, a group of pastors in Denver met to discuss issues facing their community.¹ They named things that sound familiar to anyone living in any city of any size: poverty and unemployment, at-risk youth and school drop-out rates, violence and limited low-income housing, among other things.

It sounds a lot like the process we are beginning with DART, and that may be what eventually happened in Denver. I don't know. What I know is these pastors were trying to figure out how they could make a difference in their community.

As a part of their discernment process, they invited the mayor to meet with them. At the last minute, however, the mayor couldn't make it, so he asked the city manager to attend the meeting. He wasn't a pastor. I'm not even sure he was active in a church. But as he listened to the pastors, he stated the obvious. All they needed to do is what Jesus says to do: love your neighbor as yourself (Lk. 10:27).²

¹ *Art of Neighboring*, pp. 18-22

² There are actually several passages that say the same thing: Lev. 19:18; Mt. 19:19, 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; and Jas. 2:8

He wasn't talking about some abstract idea of neighbor, though. He meant the person who lives next door to you. Love *that* neighbor as you love yourself. The pastors were chagrined by the city manager's simple answer.

But how can you love your neighbor if you don't *know* your neighbor?

Out of that conversation, the neighboring movement was born. It began in response to that simple, profound conversation among people who should have known the answer all along. They also realized the problem is we need to get to know our neighbor before we can become a good neighbor.

So where do we start?

If you will look at the cover of your bulletin, you'll see a picture with a house in the middle of a series of boxes. Imagine your house in the center. The eight boxes around it represent the eight front doors closest to our own front door. Take a moment to figure out which eight doors that is for your house. Some may be behind your house; some may be across the street. In an apartment complex, they may go up and down a hallway. Out in the country, they may be miles apart.

It doesn't matter where you live, there are eight front doors nearest your front door, eight front doors that give your neighbors access to the common area between your homes.

The first step in neighboring is to figure out who those eight people are.

- How many of you can tell me the names of the people living behind those eight doors?
- How well do you know those neighbors?

Obviously, some of us are better at doing that naturally than others are. But we can learn to do it – even if you are an introvert like myself.

In the neighboring process, we work toward getting to know those neighbors on three different levels.³ Those three levels are alluded to with the small letters in those boxes.

- a. We want to know their name.
- b. We want to know something about them that you can't tell by looking at them. I mean, she drives a blue car is different than she is a pharmacist.
- c. And we want to know something they long for or dream of.

Now, to get that information, you'll need to have a conversation. And it won't be just one conversation. This will take weeks and months, if not years, to complete. But if you don't start with a plan, you'll never get there – especially if this doesn't come naturally to you.

Think of this picture on your bulletin as a map, a road map, or maybe a plan of action with the goal of filling in each box.

There was a period of time when I made a fairly frequent drive past a house that always caught my attention. It seemed to be continually 'under construction.' Maybe you've seen one like it before.

It had an unfinished appearance and a strange mixture of visual textures as you looked at it.

- On one end of the house, it looked as though rough plywood had been nailed over stud walls without any effort to provide a finish.
- In the middle, there was a section that had old linoleum-like siding that looked more like a floor turned on end than a wall.

³ *Art of Neighboring*, p. 37

- And at the far end of the house there was a brick-like siding – you know the stuff, sheets of plastic molded and colored to look like bricks – with the edges curling up to indicate to me that it was either intended as an interior wall covering or simply poor-quality construction methods.


As I drove past that house over the course of time, I often wondered about the person or family that lived there. I wondered about their plans for the house. My first theories were that it was a case of doing their own work with the materials they could afford – leaving an unfinished and low-quality appearance. But as time passed by, I began to wonder if it was more a case of not having a plan and just adding on and doing what seemed to work.

That house comes to my mind and “haunts” me at times. You see, it is easy to start a new thing and forget what you were doing. It’s why New Years’ Resolutions fail so often. It’s why we need a plan.

That’s why we gave you the bulletin cover. It can become the template for your own neighborhood map. Use it to create your own unique map. Make sure you leave room in the boxes to write some information. We keep ours on the refrigerator as a reminder to keep the conversations going and provide a place to write answers to the questions as we get to know our neighbors.

Like the cover on your bulletin, put your home in the middle. Around it are your 8 closest neighbors. In each box are three letters, a., b., and c. Fill out the form with

- your neighbors’ names,
- something you know about them, and
- what they long for or yearn for.

a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.
a. b. c.		a. b. c.
a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.

Let’s practice. With your bulletin in hand, place yourself in the pew where you are sitting and identify the 8 closest neighbors to you, the people sitting closest to where you are sitting this morning. (For those on zoom, maybe use the people on the screen around you as we practice.) Let’s start a conversation and see how many names you can fill in. If you have time, or already know their names, work on relevant information. And if you already know that, ask about hopes and dreams.

We’ll practice for 3 minutes. It won’t be enough time to finish, but it will be enough to learn how to use the “map” as a tool, a tool to get to know your neighbors.

<< Set Alarm for 3 Minutes >>

Thank you.

Some of you are probably wondering, why?
 Why do we need to get to know one another?
 Why should we get to know our neighbors?

You may be thinking, I come home from work and I want to get away from the world. I want peace and quiet; so I do like most other people, I treat my home as a refuge, a place to retreat and rest. Why should I interrupt that practice?

Well, aside from the admonition of Jesus that I already mentioned, there are some significant beneficial side-effects of neighboring.

In her TED Talk, Susan Pinker speaks about the factors that lead to longer and healthier lives.⁴ The number one factor, according to her research, is social interaction.

And it's not just her research that suggests it!⁵ BYU did a study that showed loneliness increases the risk of death by 26%. Loneliness. Meanwhile, State Farm, the people who say they are like good neighbors, found that while many people think it's important to be a good neighbor, only 16 % of men and 11% of women actually plan social events with their neighbors!

Why neighbor? Because it's good for you. And it's good for your neighbors. And it's good for our community. It's a way to make the place we live become a better place to live.

I don't know if you've ever watched those reality TV shows where they look at real estate, to flip a home in one case, or to offer an alternative to their own remodel in another. If you have, you know that there is a lot of focus on the house. Almost no one talks to the neighbors.

And yet, when you talk to people about their neighborhood, it's almost always the neighbors that make it a good place to live.⁶

Had the priest or the Levite known the person on the side of the street, if they had considered him a neighbor, I am convinced they would have responded to the crisis differently. And the man on the side of the street would have known them by name, so he could have called out for help. There would have been a better outcome for all of them.

The goal is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Or as I suggested to the children this morning, to treat other people the same way we want to be treated.

We'll be talking about more strategies for neighboring over the next few weeks. Today's homework assignment is to make your own neighborhood map and to begin filling it in.

There will be no test next week – at the same time, I'll remind you that Jesus calls us to love our neighbors. And we start the process of loving our neighbors by getting to know our neighbors.

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⁴ https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_pinker_the_secret_to_living_longer_may_be_your_social_life

⁵ <https://neighboringmovement.org/>

⁶ *Art of Neighboring*, p. 9

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