

Neighbors

Week 1 - Won't you be my neighbor?

Memory Verse

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. Leviticus 19:18 NIV

Thinking About Our Neighbors

Read Luke 10:25-37, then read this and answer the question below.

Our culture today emphasizes difference. Our world encourages us to look at people who agree with our opinions as our “tribe” and those who hold a different view as somehow fundamentally different. It could be race or economics that separate us. It could be gender or generation. It could be politics or religion. Our culture urges us to see people who are different from us as wrong, other than us, or even as our enemies.

In our reading, Jesus illustrates the idea of being a loving neighbor by telling a parable about two men who had, according to their culture, had irreconcilable differences - a man from Jerusalem (we assume he's Jewish) and a Samaritan. These two had differences of opinion about worshiping God, even though they had the same essential faith. Their tribes **did not** get along and had hundreds of years of bad blood between them.

This Samaritan did three things right. First, he was on the lookout for someone in need! He was aware of those around him and alert for God calling him to do something. He was ready and willing to get involved - even if it might cost him money or distract him from his schedule.

Second, as he was looking, he saw the Jewish man as his neighbor, as someone who needed help, despite their cultural disagreement. Jesus emphasizes this fact by saying that two other Jewish men passed by without stopping to help - even though they shared much with him. So often, the most important things you can be are present and available. However, seeing our neighbor and recognizing his need is only part of what God calls us to do.

Third, the Samaritan took real action. He didn't say nice things, empathize, or try to cheer the Jewish man up. Instead, the Samaritan went out of his way to care for his neighbor, giving up

his time, property, and money - and he even made arrangements to care for his future needs ... because he knew there would be needs. There is never a shortage of need!

This is the call of Jesus. Jesus invites us to look for our neighbors everywhere every day. Some of our neighbors will look and think and talk just like us. Some will look different or have a different lifestyle. Some of our neighbors will disagree with our opinions. Some of our neighbors will dislike (or maybe hate) us for who or what they feel we are.

Jesus is asking us to see our neighbors and recognize their needs and then to take action!

Questions

1 - It's been said that the most beautiful sound to someone is hearing their name. Write down the name of at least one of your neighbors (for each area below) who has a very different ...

...political opinion than you

...faith than you

...socioeconomic background than you

2 - How can you love each of them as the Samaritan loved? And when?

3 - If you don't have a name for each blank, what can you do to meet your neighbors? When?

Bible Readings about Neighbors:

As you read these verses, make notes about each one. What stands out to you?

Leviticus 19:18

Proverbs 14:21

Luke 6:32-36

Luke 14:12-14

Ephesians 4:22-25

James 2:1-9

James 4:1-12

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Next Steps

1 John 3:18 says, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." How do you plan on taking what you have learned here and turn it into action?

Study On Your Own

Here are some passages for deeper exploration. Take some time to read and think about them.

Job 6:14-20

Matthew 25:31-46

Galatians 5:13-26

Neighbors

Week 2 - Neighbors Speak the Truth in Love

Memory Verse

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. Ephesians 4:25 NIV

Thinking About Our Neighbors

Read Ephesians 4:11-29, then read this introduction and answer the question below.

The first part of our reading talks about us, the body of Christ, and how we should grow to become mature. The second half talks about living out this new, mature life. In both parts, the letter calls out our speech.

And God points out why the truth is so essential... because we are all in this together.

The reality is that God is calling us to be honest with our neighbors. It's not enough not to lie to people. We're commanded to speak out, even if what we say is difficult for them to hear (and for us to say). We are directed to speak up in defense of the weak, the poor, and the oppressed, even when it's easier to stay silent. We're to make sure that we're saying what needs to be said to help others - with everything we say - every day - to everyone.

God is calling us to place our neighbors' needs above our own comfort in speaking. And God is calling us to be honest about what matters most - the love God has for us through Jesus Christ, which is one thing everyone needs. That includes speaking to those who are different from us, who have a different language, culture, or beliefs. God also includes the ones we really don't like or who don't like us - and even the neighbors that we disagree with on the issues that we think are most important. We are called to speak up, even when it's uncomfortable to speak the truth. Maybe especially when it's painful to speak the truth.

God is calling us, as disciples of Jesus, to speak differently than the world encourages us to. God commands us to talk to our neighbors in a way that benefits them with every word out of our mouths. We are to speak the truth in love and to build others up - just as Jesus would if he were walking in our shoes (or driving in our car, or making comments on our social media).

Questions

1. What's the most challenging part of God's truth for you to talk about to friends, neighbors, or family members? Why?
2. Have you recently held back from saying something that someone needed to hear because it was uncomfortable for you or them? Should you go back and say it now?

Bible Readings about Neighbors

As you read these verses, make notes about each one. What stands out to you?

Exodus 23:1-5

Psalms 15:1-5

Zechariah 8:14-17

Matthew 5:14-16

Colossians 4:5-6

1 Peter 2:11-17

Study On Your Own

Proverbs 3:27-30, 12:22

Jeremiah 9:1-6 (Jeremiah is lamenting Israel's behavior v1-2 and then God responds v3-6)

John 8:31-47 (Jesus is speaking to a group of Pharisees and Jewish believers. Bonus points for reading John 8:12-58 to read the whole exchange)

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (Paul is instructing the church about the end of time)

Conclusion

In James chapter 3, we find classic verses about our speech. Take a minute and read it now.

It ends with this advice about true spiritual wisdom, which we should apply to our thinking about speaking truth to our neighbors... *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

We can't speak the truth to our neighbors if we're not doing it with the right God-given mindset and motives. Our "speech" (or emails or Facebook posts or phone calls or whatever) should be pure, peaceful, considerate, submissive, impartial, and much more. This is a far cry from the way the world encourages us to speak today.

So what will you do about it?

Neighbors

Week 3 - Neighbors Seek God's Justice

Memory Verse

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. - James 2:8-9 NIV

Thinking About Our Neighbors

Read Matthew 25:31-46, then read this and answer the question below.

Ahh, the parable of the sheep and the goats. An easy one. At the judgment, Jesus will separate people based on actions they took in life, like feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, caring for the sick, and visiting prisoners. Do good and be rewarded. Simple, right?

Interestingly, Jesus calls us to go and visit prisoners yet doesn't differentiate between guilty prisoners and those wrongly convicted or awaiting trial. He includes caring for the sick but doesn't say, "it's OK not to care for those people whose life choices led to their sickness." Likewise, we should feed the hungry, but God doesn't tell us to determine whether the hungry person truly deserves our help. Why? Because that's not how God operates. God's love extends to all sinners (and that's everyone).

God is calling all people to repent and to surrender their lives. All of our neighbors need the forgiveness found only in Jesus. God wants us to show His love impartially by loving all of our neighbors, not just the people we find most deserving of love or the people who we are comfortable supporting.

God expects His people to be on the lookout for opportunities to seek God's justice for our neighbors in this sinful world. Therefore, God calls us to actively spot injustice and help those around us who are struggling.

Sometimes, we don't want to serve everyone in need. For example, some Christians choose to strive for racial equity for everyone by standing with anyone who struggles with discrimination or oppression. Others, however, are not enthusiastic about supporting those who march in protest or those who fight with police or cause property damage during times of racial tension. But God doesn't call us to help

those in need who also behave as we prefer - God calls us to help the oppressed. God doesn't add, "...if you're comfortable with that."

Similarly, in sexuality and gender issues, some Christians choose to help those who struggle for inclusion and equality or suffer from physical or mental health issues. Others point to sinful lifestyles and decide to stand aside. God tells us not to judge but instead to show the love of Christ to them - even when their choices lead them away from God. And perhaps that is the most critical time to show love to someone and make sure they receive care, compassion, and justice.

God calls us to care for "the least of these" even if we disagree with them and their actions.

It is possible to love the sinner without condoning the sin - after all, God loved us first while we were sinners and yet did not ignore our sin. (Rom 5:8) And remember Paul worked hard to meet people where they were, being "all things to all people that by all means, I might save some." He then added, "I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (1 Cor 9:22-23)

As God's children, we should earnestly desire to see God's kingdom operating around us for all of our neighbors, just as it does in heaven. In an unfair world, we as Christians should be an equalizing force, helping to make our neighborhood a more equitable, caring, and just place to live.

Questions

1. Are you aware of a group of neighbors who needs someone to speak up for them - no matter whether they caused their situation or the world caused it? Who are they? How can we help?

2. Which of our neighbors started life with a disadvantage (or became disadvantaged) no matter who is to blame? How might we take action to assist them?

3. Who, among our neighbors, has done something (or is still doing something) that you think is wrong or sinful? Do they have a need that you can serve? Will you? Why or why not?

Bible Readings About Neighbors

As you read these verses, make notes about each one. What stands out to you?

Deuteronomy 10:17-19, 24:17-18, 27:19

Psalms 9:7-10

Micah 6:6-8

James 2:1-13

Study On Your Own

Isaiah 11:1-5

Romans 2:1-16

Conclusion

The concept of acting justly with our neighbors can be a bit tricky. On the one hand, we want to see God's judgments served and see the wicked come to justice. We want to do good to those who do good! On the other hand, we are sinners in need of mercy, and we have no way to save ourselves from a future so bad it's called "the second death." God has shown us mercy, and we should be eager to show compassion and teach others about God's mercy. God is calling us to act justly without judging.

What can we do to answer that call?

Neighbors

Week 4 - Neighbors Give

Memory Verse

And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Hebrews 13:16

Thinking About Our Neighbors

Read this and answer the questions below.

We serve a giving God. God gave Abraham a family and then gave his descendants a special land to give them rest. On the way, God gave us the Law to help us know how to live with our neighbors. He gave us prophets to let us know what was coming. They recorded the signs God was giving us, and those gave us a vision of the coming Messiah.

Then, in time, God gave us Jesus and grace and mercy. Jesus gave us examples of the best way to live with and serve our neighbors. Then God gave us the Holy Spirit, who gives us power and wisdom and other “fruits.” God gives us peace and comfort. He gives us food and shelter. God gives and gives and gives.

And God calls us to give too. When we think about giving, it’s easy to think about money first (and sometimes stop there). Interestingly, God not only calls us to supply money and time (in the form of providing food, shelter, and care) for our neighbors in need - we are called to give other things as well.

For example, we are commanded to give the good news to our neighbors and pray for them. Romans 10:17 says, “...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” Ephesians 1:16 says, “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

There are plenty of commands directing us to give to our neighbors. If we stop at writing a check, we’re missing out on the great work God is calling us to join in.

Questions

1. When you think about your Christian giving, what three things are at the top of your list? Why?
 - 1.1.
 - 1.2.
 - 1.3.
2. What do you think are the top three issues facing the neighbors in our community and church?
 - 2.1.
 - 2.2.
 - 2.3.
3. How/what/when could you give to help meet these needs?
 - 3.1.
 - 3.2.
 - 3.3.

Bible Readings About Giving To Our Neighbors

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

Proverbs 22:9

Matthew 19:16-30

John 15:12-14

Romans 15:5-7

Study On Your Own

Matthew 6:1-2

Hebrews 13:1-3, 16

Ephesians 5:15-20

Colossians 3:12-16

1 John 3:7-18

Conclusion

In the Old Testament, God gave us commandments. In the New Testament, Jesus explained that the law was not meant to be obeyed in a “legalistic” way - that God was calling us toward perfection rather than asking us to merely check off all the boxes of the law.

Jesus calls us to give up our life. Maybe he’s doing the same with giving that he did with the rest of the law. Maybe he’s telling us that giving money is merely fulfilling the letter of the law. Maybe Jesus is calling us to give everything instead - our time, our possessions, our priorities, and our opinions - our very lives.

Giving everything is a tall order. Luke 14:28-35 talks about counting the cost of being Jesus’ follower.

Take a minute and read the whole passage. What do you think?

Neighbors

Week 5 - Neighbors Get to Know Their Neighbors

Memory Verse

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

Psalm 82:3 NIV

Thinking About Our Neighbors

Read [Isaiah 1:7-20](#) and then read this and answer the questions below.

Our neighbor isn't just the person next door. Our neighbor is the person God has placed right in front of us. We are commanded to be a neighbor at all times. And no matter how different, how inconvenient, or how unexpected, we're asked to love our neighbor well.

And we're all busy. We have lots of things that we need to do every day. Our calendars are full, and we're comfortable that way. But God is commanding us to think about someone else.

First, consider the kids in foster care in our community and the single-parent rushing their child into the elementary school just a little late. And what about the person who lost their spouse a few years ago and lives on their own or in a nursing home? How can we understand their lives or their needs if we're not in their situation?

Second, think about people experiencing discrimination because of their sexual orientation, unable to get a job or an apartment, or not welcome at a local business. Some of our neighbors suffer racism and have less opportunity to succeed because of the color of their skin. What about those who protest that they are being treated unequally in a country where equal protection is the law of the land? How can we stand up for these neighbors if we don't understand their situation and sometimes don't agree with their actions?

And yet God tells us that these are the very people we are called to get to know. We are commanded to take up their cause and defend them.

In the reading today, Isaiah is calling out Israel, who has turned from God. But they, and we, are not just called to avoid sin (v 16). God commands us, “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” (v 17)

They are crying out that they are oppressed, that their freedoms have been taken away. They have been denied justice. And God tells us that we are commanded to hear their cry and to show them compassion and kindness -- even if we don't like the way they're acting. God tells us to make sure they are protected and loved, simply because they are oppressed. In fact, “defend the oppressed” could also be translated as “correct the oppressor,” - which suggests that it's not enough to stand by and watch but that we are called to help bring justice.

And we can't do that if we're not taking the time to be an active, involved neighbor.

Questions

1. Write down the name of a single parent or a child without a father who you know about.
What can you do this week to get to know them better and understand their needs?

2. Write down the name of a widow or widower who you know about. How can you “take up their cause”, help them or even just spend a little time with them this week?

3. Is there a specific group calling for justice today where you disagree with the behavior of the group? Can you see a way to seek justice for them?

4. Should I lift them up, and seek justice for them even when I believe that their “cause” goes against what Jesus teaches us?

Bible Readings About Our Neighbors

Deuteronomy 10:12-19

Proverbs 14:21, 29:7

Proverbs 31:17-20

Isaiah 16:5

Luke 11:42

Galatians 6:9-10

Study On Your Own

Isaiah 58:5-11

James 2:2-6

Conclusion

It's hard to hear the cry of the oppressed if we're not being intentional about listening. If we happen to hear it, it's then easy to ignore it because we are busy doing good things. When we don't ignore their cry, it feels impossible to make an impact because so many issues are long-standing, systemic problems. This reminds me of an old story...

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking up and gently throwing things into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "Young man, what are you doing?" The boy replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."

The man laughed to himself and said, "Don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make any difference!" After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said,

"I made a difference to that one."

Neighbors

Week 6 - Neighbors Show Compassion

Memory Verse

The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly. - Proverbs 18:23

Thinking About Our Neighbors

Read Ephesians 4:32-5:2, then read this and answer the questions below.

A few weeks ago, we talked about speaking the truth in love, and this reading follows the one we looked at in that lesson. Paul is writing to the Ephesians about living a life as a community of mature Christians in chapters 4 and 5. Here in the middle, he talks about being kind and compassionate to each other and forgiving each other as a central part of that life.

Showing mercy to our neighbors, treating them with kindness and compassion is not just nice to do. We are not told to do it just because it's "the right thing" to do. We forgive others because Jesus forgave us. We are dearly loved children of God and are called to follow God's example in being kind and compassionate. We love our neighbors because God first loved us.

When we are closely following Jesus, compassion for others comes more naturally. Even for those who are not like us or don't care for us, showing kindness can be a part of our everyday lives. When God is our center, forgiveness flows from us when the world would show anger - mercy flows from us when the world offers none.

But more often, it is not so easy to be merciful. We are encouraged by the world to think of our opinions and feelings as more important than those of our neighbors. Compassion takes more effort. Kindness is something we have to choose to do. And as CS Lewis said, "We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it." Treating all of our neighbors with mercy, kindness, compassion, and forgiveness is a challenge. We're called to face that challenge every hour of every day - and to come back and face it again each time we fail.

The world is not forgiving. The cross is.

The essence of the Christian life is sacrifice - giving up our plans, priorities, and opinions in order to follow Jesus. In exchange, we get to be like Him. We get to live an eternal life starting the moment we trust in Jesus. That life can be one of supernatural power to do what the world won't do ... to live a life of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. We get to be voices, hands, and feet of mercy in the world and then enjoy God's mercy for eternity.

Questions

1. Write down the name of a neighbor outside of the church who really needs some kindness and compassion. What would it look like if Christians around them acted intentionally kind and deliberately compassionate toward them? What would happen?

2. Do you have a neighbor who distrusts (or maybe dislikes) the church? What is one specific way that you could speak or act compassionately to help begin to rebuild that trust?

3. Does the idea of living a life of sacrifice - setting aside what matters to you and taking on the priorities of Jesus - make you uncomfortable? What should you do about it?

4. Do you have a neighbor who you have not forgiven or who has not forgiven you? What can you do to plant the seeds of forgiveness?

Bible Readings About Our Neighbors

Proverbs 14:31 and 21:10

Matthew 5:7, 6:14

Luke 6:32-38

Colossians 3:11-14

Study On Your Own

Isaiah 58:1-11

Romans 12:3-8

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

James 1:19-27

2 Corinthians 6:3-13

Conclusion

When we take our last lesson about our speech and build onto it with these ideas of mercy and forgiveness, we can see that it's important to not just act with kindness but to speak compassionately as well. We can revisit James 3:17 from that lesson with this in mind as well, and make sure our speech to others is ... *pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

By speaking and acting with the love and mercy we've been shown by Jesus, we can show our neighbors that Jesus is real and alive in our life. And we can only act and talk that way every day when we allow the Holy Spirit to take over our life - when we give ourselves wholeheartedly to a life of following Jesus.

We can only live a life of loving our neighbors by surrendering ourselves completely in obedience to Christ. That's exactly the opposite of what the world tells us to do every day. So how do we possibly make that choice every day?

Thankfully, it's God's job to provide all the faith we need to live the life that we are called to, loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. And when we ask for it, Jesus told us that we'll receive it.

Neighbors

Week 7 - Neighbors Gather and Encourage

Memory Verse

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Thinking About Our Neighbors

Read Mark 12:28-34 and then read this and answer the questions below.

The book of Leviticus outlines many religious rituals for the Hebrew people, directly from the mouth of God. Moses teaches the people, and these practices go on to form the basis of a religion that still worships God today - and is the backdrop for our Christian practice.

There are sin offerings outlined, as well as offerings making a pledge to God. However, one is a bit different - in Leviticus 7, we read about the Fellowship Offering. Some bible translations call this the Peace Offering though it is not a “peace offering” as we use the term today to calm someone down when we have upset them. It’s given that name because the offering’s name in Hebrew is the root word that we get shalom (peace) from. This offering made a way for the worshipper to celebrate and experience God’s presence and peace, as well as the joy of fellowship with God and all the people.

While the Fellowship (Peace) Offering was traditional in many ways - for example, it was brought to the priest at the temple. There were rules for what to bring and how to perform the ritual, etc. - two things are remarkably different about it:

1. It’s completely voluntary - it’s not mentioned that the people “must” do it as some other offerings are. This offering is one that a worshipper brings to celebrate what God has done or what God is going to do because the person feels that they should bring it.
2. All of the neighbors get to join in!! With a burnt offering, 100% is given to God, and other offerings are described giving God the best parts and the priests taking other parts. In the Fellowship offering, God gets the best parts, the priest gets a part, and the worshiper, their family, and the community all get to partake of the offering as well. The poor and needy among the people are included too.

Today, we have a similar tradition in the church. We occasionally gather to celebrate what God has done and what God is doing. We bring out food, it's blessed by the pastor, and we all gather to eat and have fellowship with one another.

However, in our modern practice, we tend to omit a few critical pieces of God's Fellowship Offering tradition. Think about these questions:

1. We tend not to set aside the first parts for God and instead rush to be first in line to get the good stuff before it's gone. How could we make sure that we're keeping God first when we celebrate fellowship?
2. We also tend not to consider the poorest and neediest from our church or from our neighborhood. Often, we don't make sure that they can partake in the joy and encouragement that we get from fellowship. What should we do about this?

Bible Readings About Our Neighbors

Acts 2:42-47, 4:33-37, 9:31

Romans 15:1-17

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

Hebrews 12:14-15

Study On Your Own

Judges 20:21-36

1 Thessalonians 5:8-15

Revelation 7:9-10

Conclusion

We've been given neighbors - placed in a neighborhood to do good works that God prepared in advance for us to do. The first step in doing that work is caring about our neighbors. And part of showing that we care for our neighbors is spending time with and encouraging them.

Shane Parrish  @ShaneAParrish · 1m
Be the biggest fan of the people you care about.

Defend them.
Keep the hope alive.
Make them look good.
Catch them when they fall.
Be there when they need you.
Root for them unconditionally.
Help them accomplish their dreams.

This tweet is not from a pastor or even a believer, but rather from a secular philosopher. If the unbelieving world feels this Godly truth, can we as followers of Jesus afford to miss it and focus on ourselves, our families, our church, our fears, our desires, and our opinions?