

The Art of Neighboring

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SMALL GROUP FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Presented by:



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WELCOME

Dear Hosts,

Thank you for your willingness to facilitate this experience for your group. We hope and pray that this study will be a powerful tool for you personally and for everyone in your group.

When Jesus was asked to sum up God's greatest command, he said to love God with everything we have and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Most of us have turned this idea of loving God and loving our neighbors into a nice saying, putting it on bumper stickers and refrigerator magnets and then going on with our lives without putting it into practice.

What would happen if every follower of Jesus took the Great Commandment seriously? Is it possible that the solution to society's biggest issues has been right under our noses for the past two thousand years?

How Change Happens

Have you ever decided that you want to work out and do a better job taking care of your body? Or, have you ever made a commitment to break a bad habit? Most of us have something that we want to change about our behavior and yet very few of us have figured out how to do it.

Changing our minds is relatively easy, changing our behaviors is a lot harder. Even when we change some of our behaviors, we quickly realize that it's even harder to change our motivations and desires. It's one thing to know you should work out, it's another thing to make your way to the gym and start sweating.

If you are reading this, it's likely that you believe certain things about God and how he has instructed us to live. You are probably aware that there is a big difference between believing something and doing it. Most people know that they should work out and break a few of their most obvious bad habits, but very few actually learn how to live differently and become the kind of person that Jesus is calling them to be.

Over the next few weeks, we aim to get back to the basics and take the instruction to love our neighbors as ourselves, literally. The majority of us wish that we were closer to our neighbors, but that is often where it stops. The real question is this, "How can we love our neighbor as God intends?"

Please read through the Facilitator's Guide before hosting your first Small Group Session. If you have any questions or concerns, be sure to meet with your pastor or church leader in advance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About This Facilitator's Guide	III
Curriculum Overview.....	III
How to Make the Most Out of Your Group Experience.....	IV
Curriculum Timeline: 3-week or 6-week Options, You Decide	VI
Curriculum Scope & Sequence.....	VII
Session 1: The Call To Neighboring.....	1
Session 2: The Time Barrier	5
Session 3: The Fear Factor	9
Session 4: Motives Matter.....	13
Session 5: The Art of Receiving.....	17
Session 6: Peacemaking	22
Appendix A: Block Map	26

ABOUT THIS FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Facilitator's Instructions: Material in *italics* is background or instructions for you. Don't rush through the questions. Give people time to ponder and discuss.

Participant's Guide: Material printed in normal text forms the Participant's Guide. This material can be read aloud or restated in your own words. Sometimes you should wait until after the members of your group have had time to respond. Avoid repeating material if the group has already brought up information or reached a conclusion on their own. Sometimes you can quickly summarize a point the group did not cover before moving on to a new section.

Reading Scripture: Scripture references are taken from the New International Version, but you may use other translations with your group. You may ask someone in the group to read the Scripture aloud. This is a great way to promote group participation, but be aware that some readers might be uncomfortable doing so. Make sure you ask willing participants.

Copyright Permissions: You have permission to photocopy or print the Participant's Guide, as needed, for use with your group members. This may enhance group discussion, or it may be taken home for continued study.

Timeframe: Each lesson is intended to take about 35 to 45 minutes, but that might be longer or shorter depending on how talkative your group is.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

When Jesus was asked to sum up everything into one command, he said to love God with our whole selves and to love our neighbors as ourselves. What would happen if every follower of Jesus took the Great Commandment seriously? We begin with our immediate neighbors, examining barriers to neighboring and practical ways we can live out Jesus's commandment.

This curriculum is based on the idea that the neighboring journey (engagement with the world) cannot, and should not, be disconnected from engagement with God. The idea of *intimacy*—or prayer and fellowship with God—cannot, and should not, be disconnected from your engagement with your neighbor. We love because God first loved us.

This is an action-oriented curriculum. Its focus is for you to get out and do. Most of what we're going to encourage you to do over the next few weeks will seem small and simple. The steps might seem repetitive at times and that is intentional. If you engage each week, we are confident that you will form some new habits that will help you grow in your intimacy with God—loving God with all your heart—and loving your neighbor as yourself.

The first and most important step is to learn, retain, and use the names of the people who live on your street. Over the course of the study, it is our hope that participants are able to move along the spectrum of Stranger -> Acquaintance -> Relationship with their neighbors. At the end of every session, have participants share the progress they are making in this area.

We want to encourage you to *lean into the repetition* and encourage the people in your small group to hold one another accountable for doing small things that will make a big difference. As with any small group, what you get out of it is directly related to what you put into it. That is why we have designed this study in such a way that allows you time to process with your group, as well as time to reflect and pray on your own.

Small Group Session Structure: 5 Steps

Every small group session will consist of the following five activities or “steps” toward being a better neighbor to those who live close to us:

Step 1: Getting Started

Step 2: Engage the Scriptures

Step 3: Discussion and Application

Step 4: Prayer

Step 5: Take Action

How to Make the Most Out of Your Group Experience

In order to maximize your growth and experience over the next six weeks, we recommend that you do the following (this applies to both facilitators and participants):

Materials Needed for Each Group Session

1. Bibles
2. Small Group Participant’s Guides
3. Block Map magnet or paper version (see Appendix A)
4. TV or computer for viewing Short Video online

Before Each Group Session

Read through the Small Group Facilitator's Guide, and study the Scriptures discussed there.

View the Short Video (online) for that session.

Read the corresponding chapters in The Art of Neighboring book. (optional)

Write down your responses to the questions in the Participant's Guide. Take time to reflect on what you really think, even if it might be unpopular or controversial. Jot down any questions.

Be honest.

Avoid preparing at the last minute. Find a quiet place where you can truly process the material and encounter the God who wants to transform your heart and mind.

During Each Group Session

Encourage participation by sharing your honest thoughts with your small group.

Ask participants to go one small step past their comfort zone.

Maintain a healthy balance in “air time” among the participants. Allow for equal participation (sharing) among the group. Encourage extroverts to keep comments concise. Draw introverts out by offering them the opportunity to share (without pressuring them).

Decide in advance whether you will show the Short Videos (online) during small group or ask the participants to view them in advance in order to leave more time for discussion.

Create a safe environment for honest discussion by not divulging other people's personal information inside or outside of the group.

After Each Group Session

Take action on the next steps identified for each week. Take action and share with your group about what you experienced.

Pray. Ask God to do what only he can do—change your heart to be more like his.

Reflect on the topic and discussion, possibly using the journal prompts.

Curriculum Timeline: 3-week or 6-week Options, You Decide

Before you begin going through the six sessions provided here, (see the Curriculum Scope and Sequence, page VII) sit down and assess with your group the ideal pacing and timing for your lives, hopes, and group objectives. Then decide together how the six sessions should best unfold in your community.

3-Week Option

The first three sessions of the following guide correspond to the three-week Art of Neighboring sermon series, complementing and building upon each of the sermons. While the small group study complements the sermons, it is not necessary to hear the sermons to participate in the small group study.

6-Week Option

An additional three weeks of curriculum are provided for small groups that choose to take a deeper dive into studying neighboring. This curriculum is designed to run over a six-week timeframe (with six sessions). The time between sessions (weekly meetings) can be used to take action on what the participants are learning through: the six Short Videos online, live sermon series at their churches, and Scripture engagement.

Curriculum Scope & Sequence

	Scripture Engagement	Homework (completed before session) <i>*Option: Short Videos can be viewed at home or in small group</i>	Journal for Reflection (completed after session)
Session 1: The Call to Neighboring	Leviticus 19:16-18 Matthew 22:35-40 Luke 10:25-37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View Session 1 Short Video*: https://vimeo.com/117428367 (4:42 minutes) Purchase a Block Map magnet or use the paper version provided in Appendix A 	Obeying the Great Commandment
Session 2: The Time Barrier	Psalms 90:12 Luke 10:38-42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View Session 2 Short Video*: https://vimeo.com/117428368 (4 minutes) 	Creating Space
Session 3: The Fear Factor	Luke 5:27-32 Galatians 5:13-26 Matthew 5:13-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View Session 3 Short Video*: https://vimeo.com/117436824 (5:36 minutes) 	Cultivating Courage
Session 4: Motives Matter	1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 Matthew 5:14-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View Session 4 Short Video*: https://vimeo.com/117428370 (4:35 minutes) 	Checking Motives
Session 5: The Art of Receiving	1 Kings 17:7-16 Luke 4:26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View Session 5 Short Video*: https://vimeo.com/117428373 (5:25 minutes) 	Becoming Childlike
Session 6: Peacemaking	Romans 12:9-21 Ephesians 4:15 1 Peter 4:8 Colossians 3:12-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View Session 6 Short Video*: https://vimeo.com/117428375 (5:58 minutes) 	Practicing Peace

SESSION 1: THE CALL TO NEIGHBORING

Big Idea

The power and genius of The Great Commandment is that it's so simple and yet extremely powerful when acted on. The smartest thing that we can do collectively to impact our city is to live out Jesus's command to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Homework

To be completed before Session 1:

Read through the Participant's Guide Session 1, **study** the Scriptures, and **answer** the questions

View Session 1 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428367> (4:42 minutes)

[Option to assign this video for homework or to watch it when your group meets]

Purchase a Block Map magnet for your refrigerator (<https://www.artofneighboring.com/shop/>) or use the paper version (see Appendix A)

Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not assign the video viewing for participant homework, play the Session 1 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428367> (4:42 minutes)

Share about your neighborhood and the types of relationships that you have with the people who live on your street or in your building. On a scale of 1 to 10, how “connected” is your current neighborhood? What are your initial reactions to the video?

Step 2: Engage the Scripture

Who is your neighbor?

In the Old Testament, the Jewish people had a different idea about who their neighbors were. Let's read some of God's commands concerning neighbors in the Old Testament.

*Leader: Have everyone turn to **Leviticus 19:16-18** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

1. Here, who is the neighbor?

The “fellow Israelite”—those within the household or community of God, those with the same bloodlines, ancestry, ethnicity. Your neighbor was essentially someone like you.

***How does Jesus redefine or expand the definition of neighbor?
(The story of the good Samaritan)***

*Leader: Have everyone turn to **Luke 10:25-37** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

2. Who are the “Samaritans” in our current cultural context? In our neighborhood, city or nation? What makes this people group an “excluded other”?

We want a definition of neighbor that fits easily into our lives, not one that makes us uncomfortable. The story of the good Samaritan is so familiar to many of us that perhaps its extraordinary and shocking message is lost on us today. When Jesus answers the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” with the story of a Samaritan (a person from the region/country of Samaria) he is making a shocking statement to his audience. He is essentially saying: include those who you want to exclude. Or: include those you are currently overlooking, excluding, rejecting, or possibly not thinking about, not considering.

The Great Commandment (“Love God and love your neighbor”)

*Leader: Have everyone turn to **Matthew 22:35-40** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

3. How is good neighboring (loving others) connected to our love of God?

Leader: Scripture teaches us that God’s very nature is loving. As followers of Christ, we recognize that we couldn’t have begun to love God if he had not first loved us. With your group, consider ways the love of God frees us and enables us to love others.

4. In what ways do we attempt to justify ourselves in order to avoid taking the Great Commandment seriously? In what ways are we tempted to change the definition of “neighbor” so that it fits easily into our lives?

Leader: Jesus was trying to get the Jewish people to see outside their ethnic boundaries by showing that anyone can be their neighbor. The authors make the point that the Jewish people were already good at caring for their fellow Jews, so Jesus was giving them the “graduate level” definition. Two thousand years after Jesus told this parable, we can be tempted to look for a loophole in the text. We might define our “neighbor” only metaphorically—as someone who is in obvious desperate need. But Jesus calls us to love indiscriminately—that means we must love our neighbor on our street or in our neighborhood. It is important for this to soak in since this will be a shift in thinking for many people. As long as people define “neighbor” as a metaphor, they will justify neglecting the people who live next door.

Step 3: Discussion and Application

- 5. What would happen if everyone made it a point to know and befriend the people who live on their block or in their neighborhood? To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The majority of the issues that our community is facing would be eliminated or drastically reduced if we could just figure out a way to become a community of great neighbors.”**

Leader: This is a good opportunity for people to dream together about how the world would change if this were true.

- 6. Fill out the block map, starting with the names of your neighbors. Using your block map, take a minute to think about each of your eight closest neighbors and categorize each neighbor as stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Keep this block map from Week 1 so that you can see your progress in building relationships as you move through the study.**
- 7. How many names did you know? Did you have any insights as you did this exercise? What did you learn or feel as a result of doing this exercise?**

Leader: Most people feel a little guilty when they realize how little they know about their neighbors. Allow people to feel what they feel, but this is definitely not the time to try to make people feel guilty or that they are not doing enough. Allow God to work on people in his timing. As a host you might feel like you should know more of your neighbors since you are the host. Avoid the pressure to seem like an expert. We are all on this journey together and we all have room to grow. Let people see you are real and honest and that you don't have it all figured out either. Your group will trust you more for your honesty!

- 8. Do you have any “invisible” neighbors? (*Invisible neighbors are those that we see but don't yet know*). Do you think you are invisible to them as well? What do you think causes this?**

Step 4: Prayer

Praying for our neighbors and loving our neighbors as ourselves begins with first examining our own hearts.

Repentance & Confession Session: Acknowledge the ways that you have failed to live out the Great Commandment in your neighborhood. Ask for God's help in forming or restoring relationships with our neighbors. This confessional time can be private (done individually and/or silently as a group) and/or collective and done aloud.

Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.

Step 5: Take Action

9. **ACT:** Learn the name of one of your unknown neighbors this week.
10. **PRAY:** Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Pray for guidance on what steps God is calling you to take in knowing, loving, and serving your neighbors.
11. **REFLECT:** Reflect on the following: What does God say about discomfort? Where in Scripture does God use discomfort to relate to us, to grow us, and to love us? Think about some of Jesus's commands to those who would follow him.

Scripture for Further Study

Matthew 5:14-17

Matthew 5:3-12

Matthew 5:46-47

Leviticus 19:1-18

Acts 17:26-27

SESSION 2: THE TIME BARRIER

Big Idea

Everyone is busy. So, what's really keeping you from spending more time with God, growing in your love for him and your love for your neighbor?

Homework

To be completed *before* Session 2:

Read through the Participant's Guide Session 2, **study** the Scriptures, and **answer** the questions

View Session 2 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428368> (4 minutes)

[Option to assign this video for homework or to watch it when your group meets]

Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not assign the video viewing for participant homework, play the Session 2 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428368> (4 minutes)

What was the next step that you shared the last time we were together? How did it go?

Leader: Go around the room and have everyone share.

Step 2: Engage the Scripture

God time (kairos) versus chronological time (chronos)

Scripture reveals the idea that there is a God-appointed time for everything, an opportune time (*kairos* in Greek), while there is also chronological or clock time (*chronos* in Greek). To which concept of time are we slaves?

*Leader: Have everyone turn to **Psalm 90:12** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

1. In this Scripture, what does the psalmist ask of God?

The psalmist asks God for help numbering—or prioritizing, ordering—their days, calendars, lives.

2. In this Scripture, what does the psalmist desire?

The psalmist wants to gain a heart of wisdom.

The story of two sisters: Mary and Martha

*Leader: Have everyone turn to **Luke 10:38-42** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

3. Do you associate more with Martha or Mary?

4. If you were going to defend Martha's actions, what would you say?

Leader: Any comments and questions are fine here. We want people to process the Scripture together and give their honest thoughts.

5. How was Martha a slave to *chronos* (the demands of the clock) and to the expectations of the world?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Martha was “distracted by all the preparations” (verse 40) which implies that she was unable to concentrate on the fact that God is in her household, in her presence; Martha is complaining and acting the victim: Don't you care that my sister isn't helping me? she asks Jesus (verse 40); Jesus points out that Martha is “worried and upset about many things” (verse 41) which implies that her work is not being done in a posture of peace (for work can also be an extension of worship), but is instead rooted in fear and worry.

6. How did Mary seize the moment, the *kairos* time (or a God-given opportunity) before her?

Leader: Scripture says that Mary chose what was “better”—which was sitting at the feet of Jesus, in the posture of a disciple, a learner—and listening to him. Mary did not miss the opportunity to be with Jesus, God in the flesh, and to be taught by him.

Step 3: Discussion and Application

7. Discuss the following three myths and how you see them impacting *your* life and relationships:

Myth 1: Things will settle down someday.

Myth 2: More will be enough.

Myth 3: Everybody lives like this.

Leader: Allow for open sharing.

Get personal here and confessional. Be honest. Allow for open sharing. Help stretch people's thinking. What negative results come from living out these myths? Ideas: there is no time for prayer, for worship, for the study of Scripture; work takes priority because you are stressed about finances; your family and your relationships are constantly interrupted by your obsession with your smartphone—checking emails, sending text messages; “hurry sickness” leads to isolation and patterns of addiction such as online gaming, pornography, and more.

8. Do you currently live at a pace that allows you to be present in your neighborhood? Are you interruptible?

9. Imagine yourself having the time it takes to be a great neighbor. What would that look like for you and your neighborhood? What are some things you could say “no” to in order to make that a reality? How can you take responsibility for prioritizing your own life?

Leader: This is a strategy often used in counseling. If people can imagine a healthier way of living, the steps to get there become clear. It can be very daunting to think about cutting activities in our lives. Imagining a better way of living can give people the motivation to make some hard choices. You may want to start by having people imagine together what it even means to be a great neighbor.

10. Share one small next step that you feel God is calling you to take in the next seven days.

Leader: Have everyone share their next steps with someone in the group or with the whole group.

11. Take out the Block Map filled out in Week 1. Update the Block Map with any new names of the adults and children who live in the eight houses or apartment units closest to you. Identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Pay attention to the blank spaces. Who do you still need to meet?

Leader: Go around and allow the group to share how many neighbors they know by name and if they have made any progress since the last meeting.

Step 4: Prayer

Ask God to open your hearts to ways you can prioritize your life in order to live out the Great Commandment in your neighborhood.

Take the time to pray in the group for your neighbors. If there is time, share a brief story about one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week.

Step 5: Take Action

12. **ACT:** Go and meet one of your neighbors that you don't know well. If they are not home, leave a note. Think about ways to move along the progression from stranger to acquaintance to relationship.
12. **PRAY:** Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the week. Pray for God to open doors for deepening a relationship in your neighborhood.
13. **REFLECT:** Reflect on the following: If time is a barrier to your participation in the Great Commandment, how can you create space in your life? Reflect on how well your calendar is aligned with your priorities (as given by God) and not “the tyranny of the urgent” or the world. This week slow down, make some space. Without first creating space to connect with God, there will be no room in our lives to love our neighbors as ourselves. How can you make the main thing the main thing? How can you eliminate time stealers? How can you become interruptible?

Scripture for Further Study

John 10:10

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

Esther 4:12-14

Matthew 25:1-13

SESSION 3: THE FEAR FACTOR

Big Idea

What are your biggest fears as you think about loving your neighbor as yourself? The power of God can help us overcome our fears and move outside of our comfort zones.

Homework

To be completed *before* Session 3:

Read through the Participant's Guide Session 3, **study** the Scriptures, and **answer** the questions

View Session 3 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117436824> (5:36 minutes) [Option to assign this video for homework or to watch it when your group meets]

Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not assign the video viewing for participant homework, play the Session 3 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117436824> (5:36 minutes)

Are you uncomfortable about spending time with anyone? Anyone you would feel strange being seen with? Why?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. We all battle hidden judgments and fears. Sometimes we feel ashamed of our own critical attitudes and sometimes we are terrified of how others will see us. We are all tempted to judge certain types of people.

Step 2: Engage the Scripture

Jesus came for the sick and the outcast

*Leader: Have everyone turn to **Luke 5:27-32** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

- 1. What assumptions did the religious leaders make about the people Jesus was spending time with?**

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Ideas: the people at Levi's house were sinners; they weren't worthy of God; they were incapable of understanding God or God's laws; God's community was not for them or God's community was closed to them.

2. What worldviews (or beliefs, values, attitudes) do you think drove the actions of the religious leaders?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Ideas: "I am better than you" (pride, arrogance, judgment); the people of God, the kingdom of God is closed off from the Gentiles; certain people cannot access the kingdom of God; there is an in-group and an out-group; etc.

3. What assumptions have you made about people? How can you begin to question some of the assumptions you may or may not have made?

Leader: Allow for open sharing.

The power of God can overcome our fears

4. What do you think are the main reasons people are often afraid of their neighbors? Who do you think is scared of you? Why?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Most of us don't realize that our fears cause us to withdraw from others and may make them afraid of us. While we're busy guessing who they are and believing the worst, they are often thinking the same thing about us. Someone has to break the cycle.

5. Do you have any fears or concerns about the people in your neighborhood? How would it be different if you knew their story?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. We usually have mercy on others when we understand their story. It is the unknown that leads us to make assumptions and leads us to keep our distance.

*Leader: Have everyone turn to **Galatians 5:13-26** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

6. Galatians 5:14 refers to Leviticus 19:18, God's command to the Hebrew people about how they should act toward their neighbors. What is the source of that love that makes a person capable of loving their neighbors as themselves?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. We must be empowered by God's Spirit to love others as God loves us (with a self-sacrificial love). This demands that we "keep in step with the Spirit" (verse 25). We love only because God first loved us. We have no power (or limited power) to love others in our flesh (or out of our natural human emotions or natural feelings). If we are loving based on feeling, then we would only love those who are like us, those who share our worldviews, etc. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to help us love our neighbors as ourselves.

Step 3: Discussion and Application

7. **What are some roadblocks to deeper engagement with your neighbors? Discuss some practical ways you can overcome your fear of interacting with neighbors you don't know.**

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Ideas: if you are afraid of going to a church small group or a neighborhood party, then you should go despite your fear. If you are afraid of introducing yourself to your neighbor, then you should do it despite your fear. Perfect love drives out fear. Pray for the perfect love of God to drive out all your fears, and then take the next step and act as God would have you act.

8. **Take out the Block Map filled out in Week 1. Update the Block Map with any new names of the adults and children who live in the eight houses or apartment units closest to you. Identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Pay attention to the blank spaces. Who do you still need to meet? What are some practical steps you can take this week to move along the progression of stranger -> acquaintance -> relationship with one of your neighbors?**

Leader: Allow everyone to share how many neighbors they know by name and if they have made any progress since the last meeting.

Step 4: Prayer

Ask God for forgiveness for any negative assumptions or judgments that you have made about your neighbors.

Take the time to pray in the group for your neighbors. If there is time, share a brief story about one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week.

Step 5: Take Action

9. **ACT:** Identify one small next step that you feel God is calling you to take—with holy courage—in the next seven days and follow through. Be purposeful this week in doing one small thing that moves you down the line: stranger -> acquaintance -> relationship.
10. **PRAY:** Identify one neighbor to pray for over the next week.
11. **REFLECT:** Reflect on the following: God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. The strongest believers are marked by a courage and a holy boldness that comes from the Spirit of God. Examine the fears in your life related to your relationships with your family, your church, your neighbors, and your community/ city. What fears can you identify? How will you cultivate the courage needed to overcome these fears?

Scripture for Further Study

Numbers 13

1 Peter 3:13-16

Isaiah 8:11-13

1 John 4:18

Ezekiel 11:19-20

John 14:12-14

2 Timothy 1:7

SESSION 4: MOTIVES MATTER

Big Idea

What motivates you to share the gospel—the good news—with your neighbors? Are you motivated by love, legalism, or something else? Check your motives. They matter!

Homework

To be completed *before* Session 4:

Read through the Participant’s Guide Session 4, **study** the Scriptures, and **answer** the questions

View Session 4 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428370> (4:35 minutes) [Option to assign this video for homework or to watch it when your group meets]

Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not assign the video viewing for participant homework, play the Session 4 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428370> (4:35 minutes)

Have you ever encountered a person trying to “sell” you religion? What happened?

Leader: Allow everyone to share.

Step 2: Engage the Scripture

The Great Commandment expresses how God intended his church—the people of God—to relate to him, to one another, and to the world. And as we relate to one another in love, we will naturally share the good news of our transformed lives through the gospel.

Good neighboring is not an evangelism strategy. Good neighboring is an end in itself. We are not loving our neighbor *so that* we can share the gospel, we are loving our neighbor because God loves our neighbor, and God is in us. We are called to love people—period.

So how do we keep our motives in check and not become people who go door-to-door “selling” religion?

Putting relationships first: loving one another and building friendships

Have everyone turn to **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8** and ask one person to read it aloud.

1. What are the two things that the early followers of Jesus shared with their neighbors?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. According to this Scripture, the early followers of Jesus shared two things with their neighbors: (1) “the gospel of God” (which means the New Testament understanding of Jesus as the way to salvation), and (2) their “lives” (which implies their everyday, ordinary lives, including their joys and struggles).

2. What does it mean to share your life with others?

Leader: Allow for open sharing.

God became like us, the Incarnation (God became flesh)

3. God became like us. He incarnated himself in flesh. What does this mean for us as Jesus followers?

God moved toward us. He came to where we were and lived among us. Likewise, we must go to where our neighbors are and live among them. Be with them. In a sense, become like them—listen to them and seek to understand their lives, their pain, and their worldviews.

Representing the love of God

“We don’t love our neighbors to convert them, we love them because we are converted.” Throughout Scripture, God shows mercy and kindness to all of his creatures, and not only his own people. Do you have an ulterior motive when it comes to loving your neighbors? While our *ultimate* motive is always to share the story of Jesus, our first motive must be simply to share the love of God through words and actions.

4. How would you feel if you discover that someone has been showing interest in you only to get a chance to convert you?

Leader: Allow for open sharing.

One of the reasons Christians are commanded to love is so that people will be drawn to ask and learn about God. Building friendship and an ongoing relationship of trust are good things in themselves. As we draw closer to our neighbors, our hope is that God will draw them to be curious and want to hear about him. We love our neighbor as ourselves—in real relationships—and pray about the God-appointed time (the *kairos* time) to share our hope in Christ with them.

5. **Do you live your life in such a way that it provokes the question to which Jesus is the answer? How so? Why or why not?**

Leader: Allow some time for silent reflection, then read the following:

*Have everyone turn to **Matthew 5:14-16** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

6. **How can our actions pave the way for a conversation about the good news (the gospel) of Jesus?**

Leader: Our good deeds often—(though not always)—precede (or go before, prepare the way for) an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus. Discuss specific ways and reasons this can happen.

Step 3: Discussion and Application

Take out the Block Map filled out in Week 1. Update the Block Map with any new names of the adults and children who live in the eight houses or apartment units closest to you. Identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Pay attention to the blank spaces. Who do you still need to meet?

Leader: Allow everyone to share how many neighbors they know by name and if they have made any progress since the last meeting.

Step 4: Prayer

Seek forgiveness for any misplaced motives and ask God to give you a heart for loving your neighbor.

Take the time to pray in the group for your neighbors. If there is time, share a brief story about one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week.

Step 5: Take Action

7. **ACT:** Share one small next step that you feel God is calling you to take in the next seven days. Be purposeful this week in doing one small thing that moves you down the line: stranger -> acquaintance -> relationship.
8. **PRAY:** Identify one neighbor to pray for over the next week.
9. **REFLECT:** Reflect on the following: What are the biggest obstacles that exist for you to share your faith as you live among and learn to love your neighbors. What are some ways in which your life can provoke the question to which the gospel is the answer? In your neighborhood, for whom has God given you a heart of compassion? Is there a person, a family, or perhaps a people group, that God keeps bringing to mind? Examine and pray through your motives—or the drive, the compelling force—behind your movement toward (as opposed to away from) your neighbors. If you feel that your motives aren't in the right place, pray. Ask God to give you real love for your neighbors.

Scripture for Further Study

Matthew 28:19-20

Luke 4:18-19

John 6:1-13

SESSION 5: THE ART OF RECEIVING

Big Idea

Are you able to receive from others? Entering into our neighborhoods as learners and listeners is key to creating relationships among equals—empowering others with dignity and respect.

Homework

To be completed *before* Session 5:

Read through the Participant’s Guide Session 5, **study** the Scriptures, and **answer** the questions

View Session 5 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428373> (5:25 minutes) [Option to assign this video for homework or to watch it when your group meets]

Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not assign the video viewing for participant homework, play the Session 5 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428373> (5:25 minutes)

Share about a time when you asked for help.

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Sometimes Christians can have a tendency toward “paternalism,” the idea that we have something to offer because we are Christians, but they (the “other,” the “stranger”) do not because they are not Christians, or they are poor, or they are less educated—you fill in the blank with the list of reasons why the other person cannot offer you something. Paternalism puts one party in the position of power and the other in the position of need.

Are you good at allowing other people to care for you? When is the last time you asked for help from someone *outside of* your immediate family?

What makes it so difficult to ask for help?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Often, our pride and our fear prevent us from admitting our needs and asking for help. But admitting vulnerability and weakness creates an opportunity for a genuine, reciprocal relationship to form. Real relationships require give and take in which no single person has all the power and no single person has all the need. Each person recognizes that they are broken and, at the same time, have been given gifts with which to serve others.

Step 2: Engage the Scripture

Giving others dignity/empowering others

Have everyone turn to 1 Kings 17:7-16 and ask one person to read it aloud.

1. Who is the widow? What do we know about her?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. We know that the widow is in dire straits! She is preparing her last meal (see verse 12) which indicates that she and her son are starving and close to death; she is a widow (she has no one to provide for her), she is poor, she has a son, she is from the region of Zarephath in Sidon where they worship Baal (see 1 Kings 16:32-33)—she is not an Israelite, like Elijah. The widow in the story is not given a name, which further signifies how faceless and nameless (essentially powerless and marginalized) this woman is in her neighborhood and culture.

2. What did God command Elijah to do?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. God commanded Elijah to move into the land of Zarephath of the Sidonians (the homeland of Baal, a foreign god that Elijah had been speaking against) and seek out a widow there to supply him with food.

3. Why didn't God just provide for Elijah directly? How do you think Elijah may have felt asking a widow, a foreigner, and a stranger (a non-Israelite) for help?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. It may have been difficult for Elijah to ask a widow—one of the most vulnerable and powerless people in society—for help. She was also a widow from an area of the country in which they worshipped a foreign god (Baal), and the people were considered enemies of the Hebrew people. In summary: Elijah opened himself up to receiving from a woman (women were not highly regarded in culture), a widow (widows were in the most vulnerable categories of people), and a foreigner. So, Elijah opened himself to receiving from among the most vulnerable, despised, and excluded people in the neighborhood.

4. How does God provide the widow with a sense of dignity and power? How do you think this made the widow feel?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. God allows the widow to minister to Elijah—a prophet and powerful man of God! The widow gives (bread and water) and Elijah’s physical needs are met. Both people in this exchange receive God’s guidance, power, and help. This must have made the widow feel empowered, blessed, honored, worthy of God’s love, within the watchful gaze of God. God blesses her through her hospitality to Elijah, and as a result she glorifies God (1 Kings 17:24).

As we step out to minister in our neighborhoods, we must be aware that it steals a person’s dignity to always be in the position of need. When you can never receive help, or ask for help, or admit vulnerabilities and weaknesses, you are not creating a real relationship but a one-up/one-down relationship in which you always maintain the power. We should try to maintain balance as much as possible. If we are always the one in power, we must learn to ask for help. If we are always the one in need, we should realize we have a lot to give to others.

Calling us beyond comfortable boundaries/God stretches his house beyond the bounds of Israel

*Have everyone turn to **Luke 4:25-26** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

Leader: Allow for open sharing. God used Elijah’s encounter with the widow of Sidon to show how he was intentionally reaching out to include those outside of the boundaries of the Hebrew people. This is why the hearers in the synagogue become so angry when Jesus mentions the story of the widow and Elijah. Jesus’s Jewish hearers do not want to include their enemies in the family of God. When Jesus remarks that God’s help was sent to a Gentile widow (bypassing those within Israel), the response was outrage (Luke 4:16-30).

- 5. Who, in your neighborhood or city, would you say are the most vulnerable, despised, and excluded among you?**

Leader: Allow for open sharing.

Step 3: Discussion and Application

- 6. Are we aware of our own needs? Deficits? “The art of receiving is not complicated. It comes down to being aware of our own needs. It’s about opening our eyes, then being vulnerable enough to ask and receive.” What needs do you have that a neighbor might be able to help you with?**

Leader: We are going to spend some time praying for and confessing our own needs, recognizing our own poverty. We can do this in pairs, or as a group, or silently. After the time of prayer, allow for open sharing.

7. What are your neighbors knowledgeable and/or passionate about? How might you enter into their world and allow them to serve you?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Our neighbors have a lot to offer and are often willing to offer it if we will humble ourselves and ask. We want to learn how to watch for ways to humble ourselves and give people the joy of serving us.

8. Take out the Block Map filled out in Week 1. Update the Block Map with any new names of the adults and children who live in the eight houses or apartment units closest to you. Identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Pay attention to the blank spaces. Who do you still need to meet?

Leader: Allow everyone to share how many neighbors they know by name and if they have made any progress since the last meeting.

Step 4: Prayer

Pray for God to soften your heart, allowing you to be vulnerable and open to receiving from your neighbors.

Take the time to pray in the group for your neighbors. If there is time, share a brief story about one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week.

Step 5: Take Action

9. **ACT:** Share one small next step that you feel God is calling you to take in the next seven days. Be purposeful this week in doing one small thing that moves you down the line: stranger -> acquaintance -> relationship.
10. **PRAY:** Identify one neighbor to pray for over the next week.
11. **REFLECT:** Reflect on the following: Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, “unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus was talking about having the heart and posture of a child. Children are humble learners. They take “the lowly position” (verse 4), they are open to receiving, and they are trusting. As we become adults, we often struggle to maintain this vulnerable posture in the world. If vulnerability accelerates our relationship with God and with others, how can we become more childlike? How can we cultivate vulnerability, openness, and humility in our lives? Why do we resist vulnerability? What are some of our weaknesses and needs that God wants to address through our relationship with him and others?

Scripture for Further Study

Isaiah 56:3-8

2 Corinthians 12:9

Luke 7:36-50

SESSION 6: PEACEMAKING

Big Idea

Are we willing to face areas of conflict in our own lives and in our neighborhoods? Practicing peacemaking requires great honesty and a boldness to speak the truth in love.

Homework

To be completed *before* Session 6:

Read through the Participant's Guide Session 6, **study** the Scriptures, and **answer** the questions

View Session 6 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428375> (5:58 minutes) [Option to assign this video for homework or to watch it when your group meets]

Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not assign the video viewing for participant homework, play the Session 6 Short Video: <https://vimeo.com/117428375> (5:58 minutes)

What was the next step that you shared the last time we were together? How did it go?

Share about a conflict you had with a neighbor. If you've not had one, have you witnessed one? What could have happened differently?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Most people are likely to share about something they have seen rather than share their own experience.

Step 2: Engage the Scripture

Becoming peacemakers

*Have everyone turn to **Romans 12:9-21** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

1. Love must be sincere (verse 1). What does that mean?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. There must be no lying or hypocrisy in the church, among believers. Sincerity connotes honesty, integrity, forthrightness.

2. Why must our love be sincere? Why should we “be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone” (verse 17)?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Non-Christians are watching. Our love is our witness—our actions, our show of love for one another reflect God’s love for humanity as well as what we believe about Christ.

3. Who is “everyone” (verse 17) in this verse?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. The “everyone” in this verse includes both the believers in the church, and those outside the church who are observing our behavior and looking to see if we act any differently than the world around us.

4. How do we know if we’ve done “everything that depends” on us?

Leader: Allow for open sharing. It is likely that there will be some tension in people within your group when thinking about this. Allow people to share. Expect some confusion around this difficult topic. Often this requires that we turn to face conflict—meaning: we confront or turn our face toward another person for the purposes of honest conversations. Are you willing to engage in honest dialogue, to confront another person who has wronged or hurt you?

Putting on “love” as we make peace

*Have everyone turn to **Ephesians 4:15** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

5. What does peacemaking or confrontation look like among believers?

Leader: Allow open sharing. Peacemaking or confrontation is done, first, in a spirit of love. This requires courage and a holy boldness to speak the truth in love.

*Have everyone turn to **1 Peter 4:8** and **Colossians 3:12-14** and ask one person to read it aloud.*

6. Why is love necessary?

“Love covers over a multitude of sins” describes the way that love is patient and forgiving of offenses. This type of love is costly. It requires a sacrifice to forgive someone who has hurt us. But forgiveness benefits the person forgiving, not just the person being forgiven. When we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts toward another person we damage our relationship with God and with others. We become trapped by our resentment and miss out on the freedom of fellowship with God and other people. We must be sure to keep “short accounts”—or quickly forgive those who have wronged us, practicing the spiritual discipline of forgiving and moving forward.

Step 3: Discussion and Application

7. **Have you ever become friends with someone that you once considered an enemy? How?**

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Hopefully someone here has a story, but be prepared to share a story of your own just in case.

8. **Is there a conflict in your neighborhood that requires you to act as peacemaker? Or, are you involved in a neighborhood conflict that you need to address with grace and truth?**

Leader: Allow for open sharing. Have the group work together to help figure out different ways that peacemaking might be approached in those scenarios. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors and conflicts that are mentioned.

9. **Take out the Block Map filled out in Week 1. Update the Block Map with any new names of the adults and children who live in the eight houses or apartment units closest to you. Identify each of the neighbors and decide if they are a stranger, acquaintance, or relationship. Pay attention to the blank spaces. Who do you still need to meet?**

Leader: Allow everyone to share how many neighbors they know by name and if they have made any progress since the last meeting.

Step 4: Prayer

Ask God to reveal ways that you can be a peacemaker in your neighborhood.

Take the time to pray in the group for your neighbors. If there is time, share a brief story about one neighbor that you are going to pray for over the next week.

Step 5: Take Action

10. **ACT:** Share one small next step that you feel God is calling you to take in the next seven days. Be purposeful this week in doing one small thing that moves you down the line: stranger -> acquaintance -> relationship.
11. **PRAY:** Identify one neighbor to pray for over the next week.
12. **REFLECT:** Reflect on the following: What happens over time when you fail to forgive people who have wronged you? Often, when we cannot forgive, we continue to wish evil on people and this destroys our relationships and lives. Forgiving does not mean, as is commonly repeated, that we forget. But it does require that we stop wishing evil on the other person. Instead, we can trust that God is aware of each situation and each heart. We can ask for God to heal them and forgive them, just as Jesus prayed for those who harmed him (Luke 23:34). Is there anyone in your life whom you need to forgive?

Scripture for Further Study

Romans 12:17-21

Matthew 5:43-48

Matthew 18:21-35

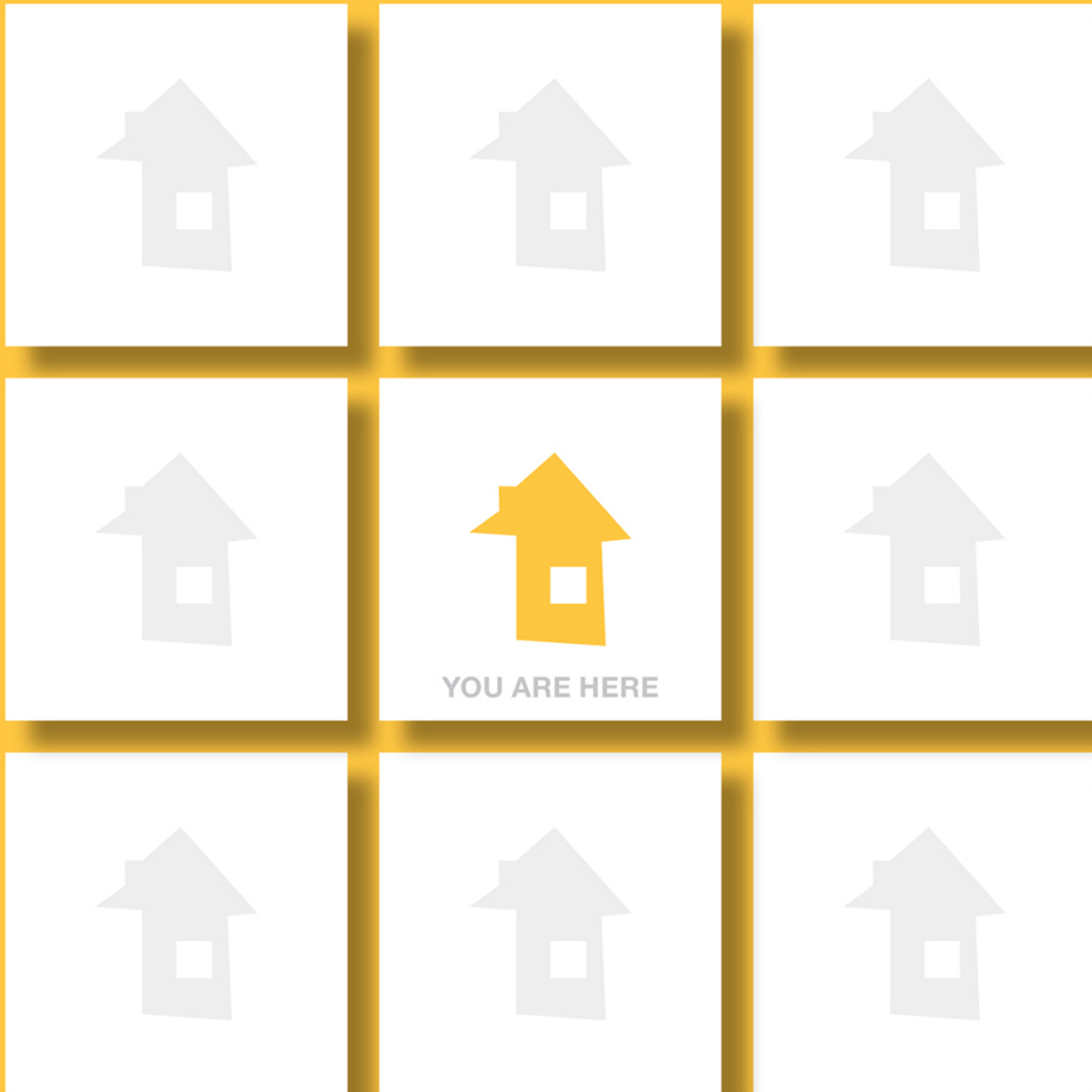
Isaiah 61:1-4

Proverbs 3:13-18

Micah 4:1-4

BLOCK MAP

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



The Art of
Neighboring

