

# The Art of Neighboring

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## SMALL GROUP PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Presented by:



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# 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.

## Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not watch the video viewing for participant homework, watch 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.

#### **Leviticus 19:16-18**

1. Here, who is the neighbor?

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

#### **Luke 10:25-37**

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”)*

#### **Matthew 22:35-40**

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

### **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.”
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?
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?

## Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not watch the video viewing for participant homework, watch 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?

## 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?

### **Psalm 90:12**

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

### *The story of two sisters: Mary and Martha*

### **Luke 10:38-42**

3. Do you associate more with Martha or Mary?
4. If you were going to defend Martha's actions, what would you say?
5. How was Martha a slave to *chronos* (the demands of the clock) and to the expectations of the world?
6. How did Mary seize the moment, the *kairos* time (or a God-given opportunity) before her?

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

### 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.
13. **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.
14. **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.

## Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not watch the video viewing for participant homework, watch 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?

## Step 2: Engage the Scripture

### *Jesus came for the sick and the outcast*

**Luke 5:27-32**

1. What assumptions did the religious leaders make about the people Jesus was spending time with?
2. What worldviews (or beliefs, values, attitudes) do you think drove the actions of the religious leaders?
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?

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

## Galatians 5:13-26

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?

### 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.
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?

### 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!

## Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not watch the video viewing for participant homework, watch 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?

## 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*

#### **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

1. What are the two things that the early followers of Jesus shared with their neighbors?
2. What does it mean to share your life with others?

### *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?

## 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?

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?

### Matthew 5:14-16

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

## 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?

## 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.

## Step 1: Getting Started

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

Share about a time when you asked for help.

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?

## Step 2: Engage the Scripture

### *Giving others dignity/empowering others*

#### **1 Kings 17:7-16**

1. Who is the widow? What do we know about her?
2. What did God command Elijah to do?
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?
4. How does God provide the widow with a sense of dignity and power? How do you think this made the widow feel?

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*

**Luke 4:25-26**

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

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

### 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.

## Step 1: Getting Started

If you did not watch the video viewing for participant homework, watch 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?

## Step 2: Engage the Scripture

### Becoming peacemakers

#### **Romans 12:9-21**

1. Love must be sincere (verse 1). What does that mean?
2. Why must our love be sincere? Why should we “be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone” (verse 17)?
3. Who is “everyone” (verse 17) in this verse?
4. How do we know if we've done “everything that depends” on us?

### Putting on “love” as we make peace

#### **Ephesians 4:15**

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

#### **1 Peter 4:8**

#### **Colossians 3:12-14**

6. Why is love necessary?

### Step 3: Discussion and Application

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

### 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

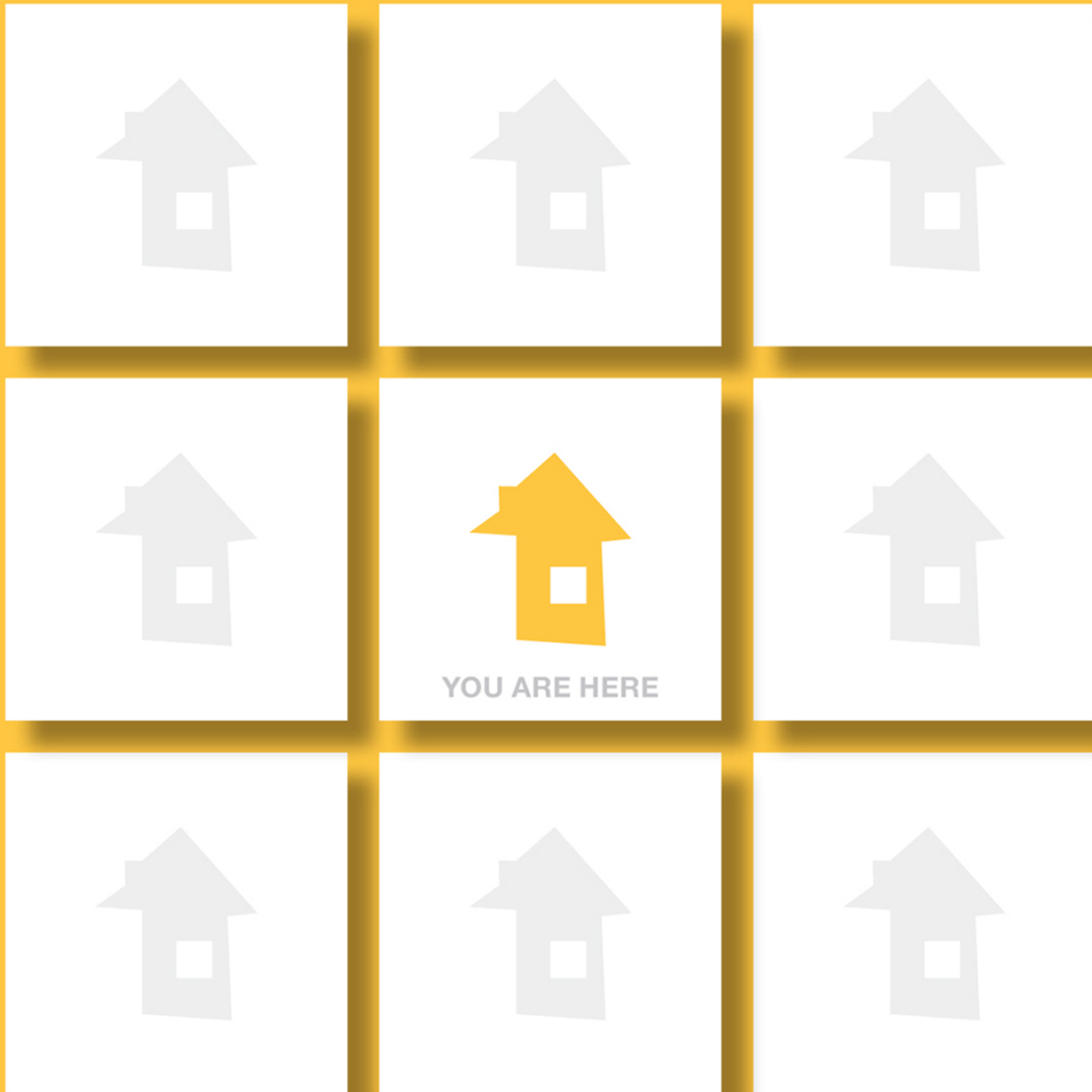
10. **ACT:** Share one small next step that you feel God is calling you to take in the next seven days. Be purposeful this week in doing one small thing that moves you down the line: stranger -> acquaintance -> relationship.
11. **PRAY:** Identify one neighbor to pray for over the next week.
12. **REFLECT:** 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

