

Family Church  
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## Welcome

Thank you so much for choosing to participate with us, here at Family Church, in our Neighboring Initiative! We hope and pray that this six-week program will be a life-changing asset for you and your neighborhood. When Jesus was asked to sum up the greatest commandment, in Matthew 22: 36-39 he said to “love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” While most of us know and can recite the *Great Commandment*, we often do little more than turn the idea of loving our neighbors into posters and decorations – never truly building relationships with the families next door unless it is convenient for us. Simply put, we neglect to actually put God’s commandment into practice.

At Family Church we want to explore the idea of taking Jesus’ teachings literally. What would happen if every follower of Christ upheld the Great Commandment with their actual neighbors? This campaign implores us, as a body of believers, to courageously address the issues in our society by starting with the houses right next door.

The Bible gives us a perfect example as to what it means to be a good neighbor. However, the Bible only works if we work the Bible – meaning we must put the Word into action. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that a true neighbor should connect with the people in their life, treat others how they wish to be treated, and have a heart of hospitality. We encourage you to reflect on these principles over the course of the next six weeks and put them into practice. Be sure to take time each week to check in with your small groups and to hold each other accountable. Never forget that you are not alone in this process and that even the smallest steps can make a world of difference in your life and the lives of others.

We firmly believe that the relationship we hold with the Father reflect the kind of relationships we hold with our neighbors. From our family to yours, we hope that you enjoy this opportunity to draw closer to God and to become closer to your community in the process. A world of change awaits, and it begins in your neighborhood.

Sincerely,

The Family Church Team

P.S. Be sure to post a picture of your neighboring initiative on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and use the hashtag #FCNeighboring. We are honored to be able to share your incredible stories with the congregation!

## *Block Map*

Throughout the course of this study we will be utilizing an exercise known as the “Block Map.” Use the chart provided as a basis for this exercise. While we have provided multiple charts within this guide, we highly recommend that you create your own chart to keep readily available in your home. Trust us, this exercise works! While it may hurt the first time around, every day presents a new opportunity for us to make progress. That’s what this exercise is all about.

Imagine that your house is the one represented by the middle square. Throughout the rest of the boxes, picture the 8 neighboring houses which must accurately “neighbor” your own.

1. Write the names of the people who live in each of the houses in their corresponding boxes. Try for first and last names, but do not worry if you are only able to provide the first.
2. Write down specific details about each of your neighbors. We aren’t simply talking about things anyone could know just by looking from a distance. Try to fill out information that would come up when actually talking to your neighbors. Do they play sports? Where are they from? What’s their favorite time of the year?
3. Write down any in-depth information you would come to know after connecting with them. What are they passionate about? What is their life-long dream? What is their biggest fear?

For most of us the first time filling out our Block Map can be eye-opening. The people who live next door may practically be strangers to us. Do not be disheartened if this is the case. Simply know that this next six weeks provides an incredible opportunity to invest in the lives of your neighbors.

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



### **Week One Action Plan**

1. Create a Neighboring block map that you can keep handy in your home. (Feel free to use the ones provided in this booklet. The importance here is to have it readily available to fill out as you begin learning more about your neighbors.)
2. Reach out to the neighbors you already know and strike up a conversation. Honestly assess how well you know them and where your relationship currently stands.
3. Learn the name of one new neighbor (or one new detail about a neighbor you know little about).

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 1* *Day 1*

### ***The Word -***

Galatians 5:14

(14) For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

### ***Motivation -***

The Bible continues to stand as the perfect guide for our lives. Our ability to consult the Word of God allows us to see His desire for us in every situation and every season of life. However, there is a fundamental difference between believing in the applicability of the Bible and actually applying what it says. Loving our neighbors is much more than a “feel-good” phrase designed for posters and throw pillows; it remains as God’s ultimate plan for the Earth. Though we are given a very clear objective, our current habits can become the biggest stumbling blocks when it comes to actually pursuing relationships with our neighbors. The quickest way to make a change in our life, ironically, is not quick at all. It’s easy to change our minds, but changing our behavior is a different story. One common example comes in the pursuit of “healthy living.” Most of us are relatively aware of the positive effects of exercise and better eating, but our awareness does nothing if we never get off of the couch or stave fast food cravings. Almost half of the decisions that we make are dictated by habit. We have to focus on small changes and baby steps that, when added together, lead us down the road towards a new way of living. Pursuing a new lifestyle requires us to break old habits in order to form new ones, a task that is much easier said than done. Luckily, God’s call on our life to “love” is not only the outcome of a Christian lifestyle, but the solution to every obstacle that may arise. When we truly love our neighbors, it becomes reflected in our motivations and responses. Love has a profound way of making room for more love by changing not only what we do and pursue, but by revolutionizing the way that we think.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

In what new ways can you begin to put Biblical principles into practice? What habits might you have to change in order to pursue a lifestyle of love?

*“Father, allow us to see the habits we must change and the love we must hold in our daily walk, and let those be an example of your love within our neighborhoods.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 1* *Day 2*

### ***The Word -***

Romans 13:10

(10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

### ***All You Need is Love -***

How would the world be different if everyone was given an example of how to love and actually followed it? Our world would be revolutionized. When we show each other love, choosing to act upon it rather than selfish ambition, we build a sense of community over separation, unity in spite of dissension, and peace over chaos. Throughout history, turmoil and conflict have never once found a foundation in love. Our ability to walk in Jesus' footsteps, upholding the Great Commandment in practice, provides the solution to all conflict. Paul emphasizes the importance of a renewed mind for our neighbors, imploring us to recognize the obligation we hold to extend love. Getting to know our neighbors won't always come naturally, and we are bound to run into some disagreements. But, in spite of it all, any tension that arises or doubt that may begin to build should be met with affection rather than a hasty response in offense. It's worthy to note, and upon the idea, that people who *pray for* one another rarely *prey on* one another. This must begin with us. We have been given an example of perfect love, and following it could spur the revolution we seek in our society. Responding to animosity with anger or frustration will only work to create divides between us and our neighbors. Building relationships hinges upon our ability to view every interaction with the mentality "How can I love deeper in this moment." In this way, our relationships become a living reflection of the heart that Jesus holds for us.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

How do you approach conflict between you and your neighbor? Are you proactive in sharing your love in every interaction? How might that look?

*"Father, let our love for others be an example of the love you extended to this world. Let us grow closer to you by diving deeper into the relationships you are building in our lives."*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 1*

### *Day 3*

#### ***The Word -***

John 13:11-14

(11) For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

(12) When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? (13) You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. (14) If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

#### ***Servitude -***

Jesus led a life of servitude. Despite his position and the influence he held, he went out of his way to serve those around him. This is how a Christ-centered lifestyle should look. We are called to “love our neighbors,” a feat that sometimes does not come easily. Personal grudges, fear, and lack of initiative can all keep us from investing in our neighbors’ lives. Luckily, Jesus gave us a straight-forward guide to break past the barriers that arise during Neighboring. Even in the final moments of his life, Jesus humbled himself before others, including Judas (who would soon betray him). He chose to remain whole-heartedly invested in service, knowing full-well that he was washing the feet of the person who would lead to his arrest. How often do we deny involving ourselves with our neighbors because of their decisions or lifestyles? As followers of Christ, we should exemplify the choice to serve, regardless of circumstance. Jesus demonstrates that distance is never the way to grow closer to people. Loving is a hands-on task. By offering ourselves to the service of others, our primary focus becomes less about us and more about God’s love *through* us. Taking the time to wash the feet of our neighbors will undeniably take effort and intentionality. It requires **us** to get roll up our sleeves, participating in life with others, and maintaining a willingness to take the first step in overcoming the barriers built between us and our neighbors.

#### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

In what ways might you be able to serve your neighbors? What barriers will you have to address in your personal lifestyle and in your relationships to make this happen?

*“Father, give us the wisdom to see where we must forgive others and the courage to follow through with a humbled heart of service toward our neighbors.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 1* *Day 4*

### ***The Word -***

Zechariah 7:9-10

(9) “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, (10) do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

### ***Confronting Offense -***

Obviously, God’s desire is for us to care for one another. Compassionate, fair, merciful, considerate, these are all characteristics of our Heavenly Father and are pillars which we are called to uphold in our own lives. However, it becomes a tall order when we must address people who have hurt us. When we have been wounded by others, we have a tendency to build walls and to guard our hearts. It becomes harder to forgive and, in some cases, harder to let others into our lives when we have been offended. However, it is impossible to be right with God when we choose to be wrong with people. Overcoming offense is never cut-and-dry and our emotions often lead us to unwanted feelings of frustration. We can very quickly become caught up in overthinking whether we love (or have the capacity to love) our neighbors rather than adamantly putting kindness and mercy into practice. The brain is a wonderful slave, but a terrible master. Most of our attempts to “think through” situations often lead us into overthinking, which is problematic because change must come through action. There is a weird phenomenon that occurs in acting in mercy rather remaining wrapped within our minds where the act of loving someone has the ability to multiply true feelings of the same nature. Evil cannot prosper in our hearts when God has given us his Spirit of peace, it is simply up to us to let that be the basis of interaction in place of retribution.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

What traits listed in today’s scripture do you struggle with? How does this create tension in your relationships with your neighbors? What might you have to give over to God in order to look past previous offenses?

*“Father, let your Holy Spirit work through our hearts to manifest love for those who have caused us pain. Give us the strength to overcome offense and the desire to pursue relationships.”*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 1*  
*Day 5*

***The Word -***

Job 6:14

(14) “He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.

***Trials-***

In this life, we are guaranteed to encounter trials. Our suffering and tribulations yield growth and prosperity in the Lord. It also provides a foundation upon which we are able to relate and encourage. If we have been assured hardship, we’d be ridiculous not to acknowledge that our neighbors will have the same. The encouragement that we have been able to find in God throughout our times of stress is the same encouragement that we are equipped to bring to others in their time of need. Our own distress yields the fruit necessary to benefit our neighbors. We may not know the exact troubles they are going through, but we cannot let a perception of wrongdoing interfere with our ability to show kindness. In this passage, Job grew tired of his friend’s assumption that he had sinned against God and explains that suffering should not be met with condemnation, but rather with comfort. Often, problems can feel much messier when we are in the thick of it and, in our pursuit of healthy relationships, we must be quick in our willingness to support and slow to assume. Paul reiterates this idea in 2 Corinthians, stating that we should adhere to God’s example, “who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Our ability to offer understanding and kindness to our neighbors demonstrates that we are willing to stand with them, even through their issues. Just as we have come to endure our obstacles for a specific reason, God has placed us in our neighborhoods with the same intention.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

How was God able to use your relationships to encourage you when you were going through a tough season of life? How might you provide that same support to a neighbor? What might that require you to do?

*“Father, give us the ability to see where encouragement can be given and allow your kindness to be magnified in the work you would have us do.”*

*From the Family:*  
*Thoughts by Shaun Jaramillo*

When I think of what it means to be a neighbor, I always think of the movie, “The Sandlot.” One scene resonates in my mind, specifically: On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the rag-tag group of boys take up their gloves and bats to play a game of baseball at night because the fireworks provide enough light for them to see. This, of course, has nothing to do with being neighborly, but within that scene – as the boys are running through the streets of their neighborhoods to make their way to the Sandlot we see a community huddled together. All of the neighbors are gathered together, celebrating together in resemblance of what true neighboring relationships should be. We should know one another, not just each other’s names, but each other’s families. We should be aware of where our neighbors work, what they like, and who they are not because we are nose-y, but because we are doing life *with* them. We should sit on our front porches as our children play with the neighbors’ children rather than secluded in the back yard. We should look after one another, not be the people that our neighbors are worried about. Lend a hand and help out by pulling weeds, or lending a tool, or even helping our new neighbors move in. Being neighborly means being reliable and trustworthy and contributing to the community. In so, I know that we are fulfilling God’s plans in Hebrews 13:1-2: “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

## *Family Church Small Group Study Guide* *Who is My Neighbor*

### ***The Word -***

Acts 17:26-27.

(26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, (27) that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (28) for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;  
as even some of your own poets have said,  
“For we are indeed his offspring.”

### ***Starting Point -***

We serve a God of inclusivity – a relational God whose indescribable love knows no bounds. As the body of the Kingdom, the Church should be unified in our willingness to share His heart for people. The Great Commission instructs us, as believers, to “make disciples of all nations” so that our world may rejoice in its salvation. Often we find ourselves speaking of revival within the church and fueling a spirit of hopefulness for a changed nation, however our passion to proclaim the name of Christ to the globe can lead to a radical neglect to those who live closest to us: our neighbors. Poet Austin Bisnow poses this question, “so, you want to change the world, but how’s your home town?” Acts 17 establishes that we have not been positioned in our cities by accident. The same God who created the Universe had a hand in placing us in our neighborhoods. We were designed for the very communities in which we live. By keeping an open ear to God’s will, the divine purpose we hold within our streets and apartments becomes a beacon for those who have yet to encounter the love of Jesus. Similarly, when we allow God to use us in our neighborhoods, our household focus becomes less about us and more about God. In John 17, Jesus prays for the unity of all believers, a task that, when courageously upheld, has the potential to alter the very fabric of society. If we are to take the Great Commandment literally - “love our neighbors as ourselves” – then the first step in changing the world must begin right next door.

- Why do we live where we live?
  - How does God use our location to benefit us?
    - How about those around us?
- How “connected” is your current neighborhood?
  - What type of relationships are present?
  - How present is God within your neighborhood?

## ***Justified –***

It's no secret that most of us probably have a neighbor or two that we know very little about. Our relationships with some of our "invisible neighbors" don't go much past a quick glimpse as they pull into the garage or a small wave in the morning as we head to our jobs. Chances are, in reading this, some of you might have a specific neighbor in mind – their invisibility is dictated by our lack of relationship which, more often than not, is probably a reflection of our own invisibility to them. Our ability to be neighborly quickly becomes reserved for relationships that we choose rather than our physical neighbors. In Luke 10:29, a teacher of the law asks Jesus, in an attempt to justify himself, "and who is my neighbor?" In this specific period of time, the Jewish people were very focused on caring for their actual neighbors, but Jesus' teaching was designed to get them to see outside of their ethnic boundaries. In the parable of the "Good Samaritan," Jesus describes that we shouldn't justify our ability to be neighborly based on convenience. While we do live in a culture that will readily attest to the importance of seeing everyone as a neighbor, we frequently disregard those who live next to us geographically. We, as a society, have turned the idea of "neighbors" into a metaphorical definition. In doing so, we continuously seek out loopholes in God's will. When left to metaphor, the idea of neighboring amounts to little more than self-designed justification and the pursuit of convenience. But, as taught in the "Great Commandment," Jesus desires us to love our actual neighbors.

- Do you have any "invisible" neighbors?
  - How do you think it ended up this way?
- Have you ever tried to justify yourself and your actions?
  - Are there times when you justify more frequently?
  - Why?
- Do you ever find yourself turning "neighbor" into a metaphor?
- What would happen if everyone made it a point to know and befriend their literal neighbors?

## ***Weekly Challenge –***

In a Colorado meeting between church and government leaders, the question was posed as to how communities could work together to create a better city. The answer, as presented by one political figure, didn't rest in more government programs or budgeting. Instead, he explained that "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." (*The Art of Neighboring*) It's easy to point the finger within the community, almost as if we are on the outside looking in. We look at

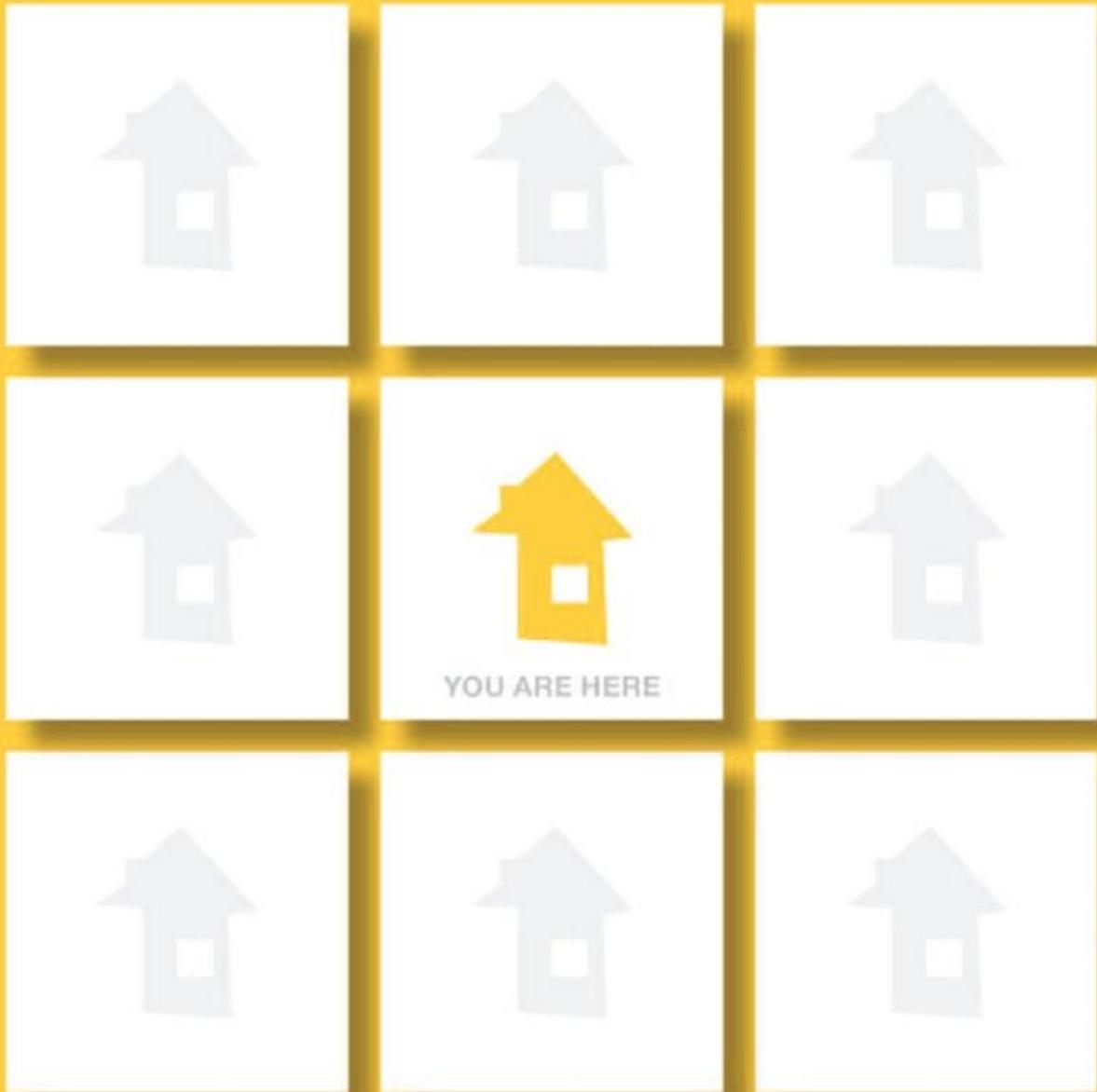
the problems instead of becoming involved in the solution; the undeniable truth is that we are just as much a part of our community as those we criticize. It is reassuring, however, that we were given a strategy to change the neighborhoods in which we live. Jesus was the ultimate community strategist, preaching a commandment that is guaranteed to revolutionize every community. If we take the time to love our neighbors, we become invested in the lives of those around us, invested in the way that our neighborhoods can interact, and invested in the salvation of our cities. When we follow the Great Commandment, we uphold Jesus' flawless plan to change the world.

- Why can't society's problems be eliminated strictly by government programs?
- Have you ever been guilty of "pointing the finger" at your community's problems?
  - How might becoming a better neighbor help to make a difference?
  - Would you say that your neighborhood is Christ-Centered? Why?
    - How might having an example of God's love change the community?

*At the conclusion of each small group we encourage everyone to do 3 things. As a community of believers, it is crucial to not only motivate one another in the Neighboring movement, but to celebrate the progress and successes that have been made – even the smallest change could mean a world of difference in our communities and our lives. Take this time to share and discuss with your groups.*

1. Fill out your Block Map
2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.
3. Come up with one achievable goal that you can work toward over the next week.

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



## *Week Two Action Plan*

1. Learn the first and last names of each of your immediate neighbors.
2. Make it a point to meet one of the neighbors you know the least. Be persistent and intentional in your interaction. Talking to them IS the priority, not a circumstance. If need be, leave them a note.
3. Work on becoming more visible within your neighborhood and establishing a physical presence. Go on walks, picnic in the front yard, or find creative ways to bring yourself outside of the house and into the neighborhood.

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 2* *Day 1*

### ***The Word -***

Colossians 3:12-13

(12) Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, (13) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

### ***We Sinned, too -***

Pain is a powerful teacher. We learn, adapt, avoid, and develop because of pain and often the things that have hurt us become walls in our relationships. Even if the person who hurt us is no longer present, or we are far-removed from the painful situation, we project our fears on others as a way to protect ourselves. It is human nature to want to avoid situations where we might end up wounded, so we chose to shelter our vulnerabilities from strangers. While this can prove detrimental to our pursuit of neighboring, it does benefit us to know that our neighbors probably go through the same struggles. When we revert to living a lifestyle dictated by pain, it is important to remember our duty to forgive in light of what has hurt us. Many of us unknowingly hold grudges, heartache, or anger toward the things of our past; it's what causes us to shut ourselves away from certain people. But, our ability to become a better neighbor must revolve on a readiness to forgive. Paul urges us to view the world in light of the cross, conducting ourselves with full knowledge of the mercy we have been shown. Jesus' actions are a constant reminder that we, too, are guilty of sin, and yet God does not hold this against us. Whatever fear, or pain, or anger we hold and project upon others, we must remember that the debt we once held against God was far greater than any sin against us. If we have been forgiven in spite of it all, then we can do the same. The ground becomes level at the cross and much easier to see our neighbors eye-to-eye.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

Is there any animosity you hold against a neighbor? Have you ever projected your fears or frustrations on your neighbors based on pain from your past? What steps do you need to take in order to forgive and remove these burdens from the paths of your relationships?

*“Father, thank you for your grace as it is greater than our sins, let it be a beacon in our lives for the forgiveness that we may extend to others.”*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 2*  
*Day 2*

***The Word -***

1 Thessalonians 5:11

(11) Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

***Encouragement -***

Encouragement can be the outside influence that separates a good day from a bad day. When things aren't going our way, having a genuine word of praise can assure us that we are not alone in our struggles and that support is out there. When placed into an environment of positivity, circumstance holds less of an influence over general disposition. Many people get stuck in a rut, focusing on problems throughout the day and creating an aura of negativity. This often becomes a snare in our lives (or the lives of our neighbors) where those who are looking in come to view us by our problems and become fearful of investing in any interactions. Negativity has the tendency to cast a shadow over who we are as people, but affirmation can be one of the biggest tools in breaking through the misguided views of our neighbors to create impactful relationships. When we are able to encourage and uplift, we create connections that draw us together and enables us to see one another for who we are and not through the veil that negativity casts. Remaining adamant in this practice allows us to enjoy each other's company and continue to grow closer as a result.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

How mindful are you of your neighbors' moods and outlooks? What might they need to be encouraged in to bring more positivity to their day? In what ways do you need to get closer to your neighbors so as to know more about their points of view?

*"Father, help us to be aware of the temperament of our neighbors, finding the courage to do what we can to uplift them and encourage them throughout our relationship."*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 2* *Day 3*

### ***The Word -***

Romans 14:13

(13) Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

### ***The Judgment Hurdle -***

Many of the issues that the early church encountered are still very present in the church of today. A prime example, and something that many of us have probably run into, is the idea of Christians judging others. Most of us can probably share multiple stories of times where we have personally been affected by this, whether on the receiving end or simply through the projection of others. This perception of judgement proves to be one of the biggest deterrents within the Church, today. A study conducted on the rise and fall of modern religion revealed that the number one cause of Atheism today is the perception of Christian “exclusivity.” What is even more heartbreaking is realizing that this perception completely contradicts Biblical principle. Unfortunately, this has become a well-known stereotype that we, as Christians, must consistently overcome. It plays into the fears of those around us and, if we aren’t careful, manifests within our neighborhoods. If our presence within the neighborhood is nothing more than a short wave from the mailbox or head nod from the front seat of our passing cars, then we give an open door for others to assume whatever they want rather than an open door into our homes. This sort of fear can also act as a two-way street, where we let the unknown justify our lack of presence in our neighbors’ lives. In this moment, our silence becomes the very stumbling block we were hoping to avoid. If we don’t demonstrate what the true definition of Christianity can be, others may be left guessing in the dark. The quickest way to drive out fear is to make the unknown known, and sometimes that simply means opening our mouths to say hello.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

What might your neighbors assume about you based on what they see at your household? Are you guilty of assuming things about your neighbors? Why do we so easily make guesses instead of taking the time to ask them, personally?

*“Father, help us to pursue genuine interaction over personal assumptions and to become present in our communities so that your Church may be known in truth and fullness for the what it really is.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 2* *Day 4*

### ***The Word -***

Proverbs 14:4-6

- (4) Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, / but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.
- (5) A faithful witness does not lie, / but a false witness breathes out lies.
- (6) A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, / but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.

### ***Oxen -***

We are relatively adept at making decisions through weighing the pros and cons of our outcomes. Especially when it comes to situations where we might not necessarily be the most comfortable, recognizing the advantages and disadvantages can lead us to a more well-informed decision on how to conduct ourselves. This is absolutely true for the spiritual work of neighboring. Drawing closer into the lives of our neighbors often leads us to weigh the good and bad. Though we are wise to acknowledge the discomfort and inconvenience that may come, we are obedient to carry through with relationships. King Solomon's reference to oxen helps to illustrate the importance of staying fixated on the positive end-goal with neighboring. At that time, owning oxen took a lot of money and effort (the amount of food they eat, the maintenance of stables, the equipment required to own them all are perfect examples). However, their cost and inconvenience failed to compare to their usefulness and the yield of their productivity. Don't let the conveniences we perceive in the immediate future when we weigh the pros and cons be a deterrent from the abundant harvest that awaits within our neighborhoods at the end of our work. God has given us our tools to yield fruit for the Kingdom and it is our job to find courage to work past our fears and discomforts to use them for his good.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

Do convenience and comfort ever get in the way of your obedience in Neighboring? Are you steered away from others because of what you might have to do or because of what might be the final outcome? What does this say about you and your motivations?

*"Father, thank you for giving us the tools to build productive relationships. Please help us to worry less about our comforts and more about your design for our neighborhoods."*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 2* *Day 5*

### ***The Word -***

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

(9) Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. (10) For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

### ***If, Then -***

The characteristic of a true friend is their willingness to help. Going through troubles in life does not mean that we have been called to go through them alone. In building a companionship with those who live next door, we foster relationships that help us get more done, help to lift us up when we are down, provide comfort, and offer strength. True friendship is not conditional, by nature. As we continue in our initiative to be neighbors, we cannot hold our interactions with one another to an “if, then” standard. God’s love for us was unconditional, so we should be pursuing our neighbors in the same way. The moment we put stipulations on our relationships, we mistakenly hold them to a standard rather than hold ourselves to God’s standard. Loving relationships are not characterized by deciding to help only after hearing about the problem and whether we want to get involved, they are defined by our willingness to drop what we are currently doing just so that we might be able to lend a hand. Effective neighboring requires a new mentality, a characteristic difference that changes our initial response to need from “So what’s the problem?” to “How can I help?”

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

Do you hold others to a certain standard in order to be your friend? In doing so, what standard are you holding yourself to within the relationship? How might your pursuit of neighboring require you to change the expectations you hold for new relationships?

*“Father, guide our motives so that our relationships may find foundation upon your love rather than our personal standards. Allow us to love without condition as you have done for us.”*

*From the Family:*  
*Thoughts by Dan Hauck*

At the end of the famous parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:36-37) Jesus asks “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man?” The answer was “The one who had mercy on him.” So to me, “Neighbor” is not the other person. It is us and our attitude toward them. Are we a good neighbor? Who do we need to show mercy to? Let’s look into this further through The Parable of the Great Banquet. Luke 14:12-24 ESV

“He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'”

In the first banquet story, it talks about reciprocation. You invite me, I’ll invite you. But Jesus is encouraging us to invite those who would never be able to repay us. Our repayment would be through our salvation and eternal life (resurrection of the just). In the second banquet story, many friends were invited, but were too busy to show up. But again Jesus is encouraging us to invite those in need because they would actually show gratitude for our generosity by coming. So I submit to you that our “Neighbors,” the ones we need to show mercy to, are the ones with the greatest need regardless of our pre-conceived notions. The ones who could never repay us. The ones who aren’t too busy to accept our invitation. The ones who are broken, just as we are broken, needing to be rescued by Christ.

## *Family Church Small Group Study Guide* *Better Together*

### ***The Word –***

Luke 5:27-32

(27) After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” (28) And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. (29) And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. (30) And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (31) And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. (32) I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

### ***Starting Point –***

It’s no secret that sharing testimony is much easier when we are talking with other Christians. So many times, as a body of believers, we extend an invitation to those who are already nourished in the gospel instead of reaching out to those who need to be fed. The culprit? We frequently live in a constant battle between judgements and fears. Every so often we are made aware of how we view those around us and base our lives off of how we believe others will perceive our actions. In these moments of assumption, we are controlled by opinions rather than God’s plan for our lives. Our fears create a divide between us and our neighbors and, in the process, can create a divide between us and God. Galatians 1:10 speaks to this idea, stating “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” God’s desire is for us to love our Neighbors, but judgement and prejudice stand in the way of us and the houses next door. By closing our lives off from those who are different from us, separating our families based upon stereotypes, we are not able to grow as a community through our diversity. Neighboring requires us to maintain a “better together” mentality where genuine relationships become the key to change. When we invest in the lives of our neighbors, we spend time exercising our ability to empathize with those who may not share our same views. A “better together” mentality allows us to understand the importance of a real connection over the prejudice that accompanies assumptions and ignorance.

- How comfortable are you spending time with people who live a different lifestyle than you?
  - Are there certain people you would be embarrassed to be seen with? Why?
- Why is it important to form relationships with people who challenge your views?
  - How could a relationship change your community?

## ***Fear Factor –***

We see it every day on the news – the consistent turmoil and troubles that plague our cities. The 24-hour news cycle has the ability to strike fear into our lives in areas where we were previously confident and comfortable. With a society consistently exposed to the idea of “what is wrong,” we find ourselves projecting our fears upon those that we do not know. We are suddenly afraid that our worst nightmares are living next door and use this as an excuse to isolate ourselves rather than become a beacon of change for our neighborhoods. Bertrand Russell explains that “fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty. To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.” Wisdom never comes through separation just as isolation only proves to foster our suspicions and fears. The mercy and compassion we are called to share is restricted by the fear we project upon our neighbors. Sadly, this anxiety becomes cyclical; by hiding away from those that we are afraid of, we give our neighbors reason to assume the worst in us. It’s up to us to break this cycle. Jesus provides the perfect example in Luke 5, choosing to form genuine relationships with those who were far from God. Being neighborly requires us to love everyone, including those whom we fear and those who have yet to find God. Breaking the cycle means breaking a lifestyle dictated by fear and allowing others to see that the love of God can overcome any boundaries.

- Are there people in your neighborhood that you are afraid of?
  - What about these neighbors makes you scared?
  - How do you think things would change if you got to know them?
- Do you think there are neighbors that are afraid of you?
  - What do you believe creates fear in others? In you?
  - How can you change this?

## ***Weekly Challenge –***

Fear will never fail to separate us, causing us to conduct our lives behind closed doors rather than with those around us. Being “better together” begins through dispelling our fears and holding mercy for our neighbors. In that light, we must never forget that mercy comes through our ability to understand our neighbors’ stories. As people, our identities, actions, commitments and convictions are all products of our experiences and the process of neighborly requires us to use these as an opportunity to grow together – a feat only possible when we engage one another. Just as Jesus chose to eat with sinners, we must make an effort to build relationships beyond those that simply make us comfortable. We are designed to be “better together,” to discuss, critique and develop with each other rather than

against. Overcoming fear and beginning a dialogue, it's how we solidify unity in our neighborhoods and change in our cities.

- When was the last time you overcame a fear?
  - How did it make you feel?
  - Why is it important to address our fears?
- What is the biggest fear you might have to confront while building relationships with your neighbors?
- What steps can you take to dispel fears that your neighbors might have about you?

*Don't forget to take time as a group to:*

1. Fill out your Block Map
2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.
3. Come up with one achievable goal that you can work toward over the next week.

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



### *Week Three Action Plan*

1. Perform an audit of your current calendar. Work to better align your time usage with your priorities.
2. Try to create an emergency contact sheet of all of your neighbors with phone numbers and emails. If they are willing, ask your neighbors to share the information with the neighborhood.
3. Invite a neighbor out for coffee or lunch and learn more about “their story.”
4. Talk with your neighbors about throwing a small “Block Party.” Begin the process of planning a get-together across the neighborhood.

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 3*

### *Day 1*

#### ***The Word -***

2 Kings 2:2

(2) And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

#### ***The Word -***

We see in Elisha the heart of a true friend. Even in the midst of his friend's personal responsibilities, he chooses to stand by Elijah's side. Friendship requires us to move beyond the idea of offering parts of our life to others and into the realm of offering our whole life to others. Neighboring means that we don't simply live a life next door, but live a life *with* the people next door. Sometimes, as Elisha demonstrates, that requires us to boldly say to our neighbors "I'm going with you." A tried-and-true method of growing relationships is to involve ourselves in the dealings of others. We see who our neighbors truly are through witnessing their motivations, convictions, and personal responsibilities and when we take the time to partner with them through the ins and outs of their day we prove ourselves to be invested in the very foundation of who they are: it's what solidifies genuine relationships over those rooted in convenience. We cannot find ourselves so fixated on our own personal plans that we don't leave time to partner with our neighbors in their own. Life is better done together, an achievement only made possible when we make room in our agendas for others.

#### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

What currently sits on your calendar that can be sacrificed to make more room for your neighbors? Do you live a lifestyle where you would welcome interruption if it meant helping your neighbor? Go through your daily routine: what unnecessary habits can be removed or eliminated?

*"Father, please reveal to us the clutter that currently resides in our lives. Give us the willpower to remove distractions and the resolution to remain mindful of the time we spend."*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 3*  
*Day 2*

***The Word -***

1 Corinthians 10:24

(24) Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

***Personal Goals -***

We are living in a society fixated on the fulfillment of personal schedules and desires. The things that we do, the pursuits of our life, and the time we spend present a mirror to the motives we actually hold. For most, the image that stares back at us is one of self-indulgence and personal desire. No one intends to be selfish, it is simply that it's far easier to know what we want over the wants of others. Instead of taking the time to get to recognize ways in which we can make a difference for our neighbors, we recede back into self-seeking habits. But, what if there was a way that the two could coincide? What if the task of neighboring was viewed as a personal goal instead of an outside responsibility? If we begin to view relationships as our desire, we begin to align our goals with the Great Commandment. We know that we are "supposed" to love our neighbors, but when we make it a priority and choose to focus on it as if we were focusing on our other goals, our mentalities, habits, and drive will be revolutionized to revolve around an active pursuit of the good of our neighbors.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

How do your personal goals get in the way of your neighboring relationships? Do you view the command to "love your neighbor" as a responsibility or an aspiration? How could a change in mentality also change your focus on relationships?

*"Father, allow our minds to be refined, staying ever-mindful of your will, and allow us to not view your command simply as a task, but as an opportunity to advance your Kingdom."*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 3*

### *Day 3*

#### ***The Word -***

Job 2:11

(11) Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him.

#### ***We're the Link -***

When we take the Great Commandment seriously, we have the potential to see radical change within our communities. A neighborhood built upon the convictions of friendship will see an active rise in support and help for one another. At the heart of neighboring, we should long to be a community that holds each of its members up in the same way Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did. They exemplify a loyalty that comes through a sense of belonging and friendship. Though Job was in the middle of hardship and turmoil, his friends made it a point to come together in comfort. What would our neighborhoods look like if, instead of backing away from people in need, we made it a point to come together in support? Security and intentionality has to begin with us. When we focus on building relationships that are centered on the well-being of people, we naturally create an environment where our lives can be intertwined. Being a good neighbor not only means growing closer to those who live around us, but in recognizing that those interactions can influence and impact other relationships in the process. Just as Job's friends came together in his time of need, we too can build a neighborhood whose focus on love transcends well beyond any trouble that our neighbors may encounter. In doing so, we become the link that starts our neighboring relationships on a path of a wider-scaled connectivity and compassion.

#### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

How do your relationships lead to a better sense of connectivity within the neighborhood? Have you seen a difference in the way the neighborhood treats you? How about others? What can make this impact more significant?

*“Father, use us as an example of love within our neighborhoods and fuel a desire within our communities to grow closer together as a result.”*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 3*  
*Day 4*

***The Word -***

Proverbs 17:17

(17) A friend loves at all times,  
and a brother is born for adversity.

***Believe Me -***

We are bound to encounter those people in our lives who never fully come to realize the passions that we hold. While they may act supportive to our faces, they are the ones that agree with what we say, only to immediately follow it with “but,” or share snarky remarks when our backs are turned. They are the people who don’t believe that we can achieve, but act as if they do just in case we do find success. There is a night and day difference between acting like we love and actually loving. The true test comes when we are faced with adversity. Trials separate true friends from the faithless ones. We should never find ourselves being characterized as the latter. Showing that we believe in our neighbors and their aspirations allows us to not only invest in others, but allows them to trust in us in the process. Loving our neighbors through adversity creates a bond that reaches much further than friendship, it brings us one step closer to family. This is where each of us belongs, and is God’s intention in the art of Neighboring. What began as “the people next door” has the potential to develop into an extension of God’s family. We must keep an emphasis on believing one another and standing firm in the heart of our issues. The main take-away here is that *acting like* we love only serves to be a superficial façade aimed at those we don’t wholeheartedly believe, whereas *acting out* in love brings us one step closer to family.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

Do you believe in the aspirations that your neighbors hold and want to see them succeed? Do you actually know what goals your neighbors have? If not, how can you develop your relationship so that you can begin to encourage them in their dreams?

*“Father, increase our compassion for others and our awareness of the talents and goals that you have placed in their lives. Give us a supernatural ability to support and encourage them in spite of trials of any kind.”*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 3*  
*Day 5*

***The Word -***

Colossians 4:5-6

(5) Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. (6) Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

***Walk in Wisdom -***

Never underestimate the profound difference that wisdom makes in our daily situations. The Bible inclines us to keep our “ears turned” to wisdom so that we may be aware of God’s will. Our approach to neighboring should reside in the same inclination. Remaining open to wisdom not only provides clear direction of where God desires for us to go, but gives us discernment as to how we can affectively interact within each situation. Every relationship that we begin to foster will be radically different from the others - it’s part of allowing original relationships to develop. We cannot expect our interactions with one neighbor to be the same as those we hold with the next simply because they are different people. Each of us has a unique lifestyle and different experiences—this lends to our unique individuality. Acknowledging this means we are more ready to approach a genuine relationship over a cookie-cutter friendship across our neighborhoods. It also forces us to consistently listen to God’s wisdom in our interactions. In some relationships we will be required to talk much more than in other relationships, or will be called to spend more time listening in silence because of our neighbor’s current disposition. Whatever the case may be, wisdom gives us the ability to relate on a deeper level. It is crucial that we understand every encounter has the potential to make a difference in someone’s life. With an open ear and obedience to God’s direction, we can make effective use of our time to solidify life-giving interactions.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

How would you define your role in the relationships you have formed in your neighborhood? Is it similar or is each neighboring interaction unique? Do you give God the space he might need to direct the flow of your conversations and interactions?

*“Father, help us to remain open to your wisdom throughout our daily conversations, giving you the room and environment you require to work on the hearts of those who come into our lives.”*

*From the Family:*  
*Thoughts by Bethany Stewart*

When I was five years old, my family lived in a suburban Southern Californian neighborhood with two twin girls two doors down. As a precocious and assertive five year old, there were few life topics I wouldn't tackle. My favorite topic was Jesus.

Without a mature faith filter, I set up my "revival tent" between two living room chairs and sat my two twin friends down to listen to my "earth-shattering" sermon. With 1 John 1:9 as my anchor Scripture, I proceeded to preach, "You are a sinner and if you do not accept Jesus as your Savior, you will go to hell!"

There was no love or compassion in my conviction and no joy in my delivery. My little friends, scared and pressured prayed a sinner's prayer. Despite my tactless, yet truthful message, those two girls are still following Jesus wholeheartedly 32 years later! By the grace of God, our less than fantastic moments can be used by God to birth new life.

When we fear reaching out to those nearby because of our lack of eloquence, knowledge, or experience, we miss out on being a part of God's plan to rescue those within our reach.

Look at Moses in Exodus 3:11-4:17. He argues with God about speaking to Pharaoh because of ineloquence and fear, but listen to God's Words:

(11) Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? (12) Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." (13) But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." (14) Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. (15) You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. - Exodus 4:11-15

Despite Moses' excuses and complaints, it was God, Himself, who gave Moses the words to speak. Moses' job was to step out in faith and be obedient. He was not alone, either! There will be times when we feel our words are uninspired, but take heart, God can use them to make an impact regardless!

## *Family Church Small Group Study Guide* *My Brother's Keeper*

### ***The Word -***

Luke 10:38-42

(38) Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. (39) And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. (40) But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." (41) But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, (42) but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

### ***Starting Point -***

Society offers a skewed perception as to what is viewed as personal value. We are led to believe that our priorities should rest in our occupations or personal goals and, more often than not, we are labeled by the things we own rather than the relationships we hold. However, Francis Bacon explains that "those that lack friends to open themselves unto are cannibals of their own heart." Pursuit of the self contradicts our ability to foster relationships where we can feel like we belong. If we are not careful to look beyond ourselves and our desires, we can be led down a path of isolation and forget our place as children of God. In comparing ourselves to others, we subconsciously put their achievements and our selfish aspirations in a place where God is supposed to stand. In Genesis 4, the story of Cain and Able proves just how quickly our hearts can devolve into darkness. Cain's jealousy toward his brother leads to the Bible's first-recorded murder and serves as an example of how our actions, when we fail to remain fixated on the Kingdom, become dictated by personal desires and emotions. While our desires may not necessarily result in murder, it's obvious within our communities to see that God's will sometimes takes a back seat to personal agendas, especially when we are given the command to love our neighbors. Time proves to be the biggest excuse when it comes to building God-ordained relationships.

- In your daily decisions, are you motivated by personal desires or God's will?
  - Can the two coincide?
- Does your agenda allow you to be available to those around you?
  - What does your calendar say about your priorities?
  - How can you balance your agenda to leave room for relationships?

## *My Time –*

One of the biggest misconceptions of time is our wrongful belief of ownership. When we consider time to belong to us, we are more likely to fill our agendas in accordance to how we believe days should be spent instead of paying attention to God's plans for us. By choosing to call it "my time," we distract ourselves from moments where we could have carried out God's will. Luke 10 demonstrates that good intentions can still separate us from God if we are not careful. By focusing on her role as a host, Martha becomes distracted by chores and household preparations, but in doing so misses out on an opportunity to spend time with Jesus. While her actions reflected the cultural "norm," she is reprimanded by Jesus for allowing personal and social expectations to take precedence over what really mattered. This is a position with which many of us are very familiar: our focus on good things blinds us from seeing and pursuing the *main* thing. If we aren't careful, we can choose to compare our actions to society's standard, and while we may desire God, we fail to consult him in what we do. Sometimes, the things that God desires go against the grain of society - the Bible even says that we are to live a lifestyle that is "set apart." In Luke 10, Mary takes an opposite role to Martha and, in doing so, goes against the norm of society. However, her choice to be near Jesus serves as an example of a lifestyle God desires, despite going against the grain of social expectation. When it comes to time, we cannot be so focused on our role in society that we neglect our role in the Kingdom.

- What is your mentality toward time?
  - How would you say you budget your days?
  - Do your plans ever go against what society might consider normal?
- Do you associate more with Martha or Mary?
  - What might this reveal about the focus of our lifestyles?

In our attempt to take the Great Commandment literally, we are placed in a position that might go against social expectations, especially when it comes to focusing on creating time and space for relationships with our neighbors. If we are to look at our time management over the past two weeks, many of us might be alarmed at how our schedules and our priorities don't always coincide, but there is truth in the phrase "the things with which we devote our time are what we actually worship." We have been led to believe myths about our time which somehow seem to validate our disregard for our own neighborhoods. How familiar do these phrases sound?

*"Someday things will settle down"*

*"More will be enough (with one more purchase or \_\_\_\_\_ then we will be content)"*

*"Everybody lives like this"*

If we are to take “Neighboring” seriously, we must address where our priorities currently rest and build the courage to stand against the myths that go against God’s plan for our communities.

- Which of the three myths do you struggle with the most?
  - How are your choices influenced by this?
  - How does it hinder your ability to build relationships?
- How do you see these myths impacting the lives of those around you?
  - Does the pace at which we live change because of thoughts like these?

### ***Weekly Challenge –***

As we continue with our Neighboring initiative, we are posed with a pressing question: Do we really have time for one more relationship? How about 8 new relationships with my neighboring houses? When we are tasked with such a large mission, the best way to start is by first understanding the steps it might take to become a good neighbor. When we are able to define the sort of lifestyle it would take to uphold the Great Commandment, the process we must undergo becomes a little clearer. While it may sound cliché, relationships and lifestyle changes can only happen one step at a time. The idea of removing activities from our lives can be a hard pill to swallow and hard choices and sacrifices are bound to challenge our way of thinking, but loving our neighbors was not designed to rest on convenience. Just as change was never made through convenience, growth was never found in comfort. However, when we trust God with our time, we welcome a lifestyle of interruptibility, where our priorities lay in God’s command rather than our own hands.

- What are some things that you may have to set aside in order to spend more time building relationships with your neighbors?
  - Would giving this up also make more room for your relationship with God?
  - How might giving this up change your lifestyle?
- Are you currently living and “interruptible” life?
  - What sacrifices might you have to make to be more open to God’s call in your life?
    - What steps can you make this week to be more interruptible?

*Don’t forget to take time as a group to:*

1. Fill out your Block Map
2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.
3. Come up with one achievable goal that you can work toward over the next week.

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



YOU ARE HERE



### **Week Four Action Plan**

1. Reach out to your neighbors for help in a project or for advice in a personal matter.
2. Do something special this week for your neighbors that will encourage and uplift them. (Bake them cookies or help them with yard work.)
3. Share your testimony with at least one of your neighbors and take time to hear more about their life in the process.

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 4*  
*Day 1*

**The Word -**

2 Timothy 2: 24-25

(24) And the Lord's servants must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, (25) correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth

**GPS-**

How are we supposed to know where to go if we have not been given the instruction to do so? We cannot be expected to find our way to a destination we are not familiar with on our own, and yet so often we expect non-believers to know the path of righteousness without ever receiving proper instruction. If we are not gentle in our conversation, we open the door for our clashing lifestyles to rise up in opposition. In neighboring, it's crucial that we do not devolve into petty argument or quarrel over disagreements. If we truly claim to be representing God's love, and yet our point-of-view turns conversation into a debate, our neighbors are less likely to engage with us in the future. Part of being a light for others means that we must continue to illuminate the path regardless of what way our neighbors choose to turn. Being resolute in our convictions doesn't mean we put more pressure on those who disagree with us; it means we consistently offer kindness while exemplifying our enduring patience. Often, these are the qualities, not our ability to argue, which help others come to truth. Geographically speaking, giving people directions always requires us to first understand where they are coming from. The same is true in our faith. Paving the way for our neighbors cannot be done in silence. We must hold a conversation to know exactly where on the map we have to start.

**Reflection and Prayer -**

Why are arguments more easily fueled by passions? How would you describe your first encounter with Jesus? Was it Gentle? Powerful? Or something else entirely? How might you demonstrate this same feeling to a neighbor who might not know Jesus?

*"Father, ease our hearts so that our passion for you may be shown in kindness and patience. Allow us to be gentle in our conversations and steadfast in your truth even when confronted with opposition."*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 4* *Day 2*

### ***The Word -***

Matthew 18:21-22

(21) Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” (22) Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

### ***Water Under the Bridge -***

Reflecting the heart of our Father means that we should consistently be training ourselves to uphold grace and forgiveness for those who have sinned against us. In the ultimate act of forgiveness, Christ died for our sins, leading us to forgive because we have been forgiven. As we spend more time with our neighbors, we are bound to run into points of tension. Things may be said or disagreements could arise that end up hurting us and causing offense. If we are not careful, dwelling on these issues can cause our relationships to suffer. It is impossible to continue on the path of neighboring if we continue to count the amount of times someone has done us wrong. While Scripture instructs us time and again about forgiveness, the act is usually easier said than done. But, as Christians, our capacity to love should overshadow anyone else’s capacity to cause harm. Even when our neighbors are unwilling to change or repent of their actions, we must continue to stand as an example within our communities. If the debt of our sins was washed clean, we should also extend forgiveness that allows any offense to simply be water under the bridge. Know that this does not mean we will not get hurt. Broken hearts and pain are only made possible because we have opened ourselves up to others and, while it is never something we wish to experience, they are an indicator that we truly are working at our relationships. Loving our neighbors may not stop us from getting hurt, but it will ensure that we forgive in light of the things that are done to us.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

When you are hurt in a relationship, what sort of offenses take longer for you to forgive? Do you find that the relationship falters because of the sin itself or your inability to address it? How can you remind yourself, in the middle of offense, to love deeper?

*“Father, teach us to stand rooted in love so that we may extend forgiveness to others and thus be an example of the forgiveness you have given to us.”*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 4*  
*Day 3*

***The Word -***

Matthew 5:42

(42) Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

***Trust in Trials-***

Being aware of the needs of our neighbors does very little if we do not do something about it. People will rarely share with us the things with which they are struggling unless they have first come to trust us. It should be a great compliment to our ability to build relationships when we find ourselves in a situation where we are being asked for help. The time will (or may have already) come where we will be on the receiving end of this situation. Recognizing the humility it requires to approach our neighbors from a position of need will put into perspective just how much of an impact a relationship can hold in our neighborhoods. Exposing issues not only exemplifies that someone is willing to share their life (in all of its forms) with others, but also demonstrates that they have faith in their relationship to evoke much-needed change. Whether on the receiving or giving end of assistance, we embrace the opportunity to solidify that the relationships we have built make a difference within our community. Through expressing and addressing our flaws and embracing relationships which do not turn away from an opportunity to give, we can exemplify the progress that can come when our neighborhoods choose to embrace a “better together” mentality.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

Are there neighbors that you trust enough to ask for help? Why is it easier to share your burdens with them than it is with some of your other neighbors? Do you believe they might view you in the same light? How can your other relationships rise to this same standard of openness?

*“Father, present us to our neighborhoods as people who are trustworthy and reliable so that we may extend a helping hand to those who are in need. Also, give us the humility to reach out to our neighbors in our time of need.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 4* *Day 4*

### ***The Word -***

Proverbs 25:12

(12) Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold  
is a wise reprover to a listening ear.

### ***Counsel vs. Combat -***

It is far better to be corrected than it is to be incorrect. However, when it comes to approaching our neighbors about truth, we must first know that they understand the heart behind our words. Our willingness to correct others can actually do more harm than good if our friends do not know where we are coming from. Advice and truth come as a big step in any relationship because it hinges on the exposure of flaws. Our natural inclination is to become defensive or fearful in moments of vulnerability, because of this it's paramount to have a firm grasp on whether our neighbors know us well enough to accept what we say as counsel rather than combat. If we don't, our good intentions can push them away in fear of rejection or judgement. Honesty isn't always the easiest thing to hear, especially when we are made clear that we are in the wrong. But, if we have established relationships of mutual trust and respect, we are more inclined to pay attention to what we might need to change. The goal in our neighboring relationships is to strive for an honest rapport. When our neighbors come to recognize that we continue to be intentional about our relationship with them, proving to be genuine about our investment in their lives, they will come to believe in the mutuality of our bond.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

How familiar do you believe your neighbors are with your lifestyle and convictions? How honest can you currently be with each of your neighbors? How might they react if you were to counsel them in something that you have noticed? What work must be done so that you can reach this point?

*“Father, give us a perceptive spirit so that we may see where our relationships are lacking. Bring new opportunities to prove our trustworthiness so that we may become more open with our neighbors, and they more open with us.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 4* *Day 5*

### ***The Word -***

Hebrews 13:1-2

(1) Let brotherly love continue. (2) Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

### ***Belonging -***

The secret to growing a community of effective neighboring is simple: brotherly love. While affection seems to be a consistent theme throughout our initiative, we mustn't neglect to recognize that we hold a greater ability to build relationships on a foundation of love than through any other means. We do little more through enticing, persuading and arguing than provide every outlet for others to doubt and approach our invitations with reluctance. But a focus on others, taking time to truly listen to their stories and engage with their life, offers a place of belonging. I believe that everyone has a hard-wired desire to belong, in some capacity. When we find ourselves in relationships where we are understood and recognized for who we are as individuals, our natural desire is to press in deeper. The Church is called to be that home for each of us, providing a safe haven for our troubles and a place of celebration in our successes. In living a Christ-centered life, we are called to offer that same environment to others. What we have been blessed to share is unlike anything the world could create. The sense of belonging that comes from being a part of God's family offers a place for everyone (and our neighbors are the perfect recipients of this welcoming hospitality). Though it takes effort, if we are able to create an environment of cordial acceptance where people can gaze upon the love of our family, brothers, strangers, and even neighbors are more likely to draw closer to us.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

Do your neighbors feel comfortable enough to come to your house? Do your relationships offer others a sense of belonging? What can you do to ensure that your neighbors feel welcomed when they are around you?

*"Father, praise you for calling us to be your children. Show us new ways where we can extend this sense of belonging to those in our neighborhood and open their hearts to the outpouring of love that dwells within your family."*

*From the Family:*  
*Thoughts by Amanda Hauck*

How do we love our neighbor through our speech and actions... even when we don't want to?

Have you ever met that person that you just can't seem to get along with? The person where everything that they say or do just really REALLY annoys you? I think we call them "Extra Grace Required," people. It can be so easy to react in anger or annoyance, at these folks, especially when they are wrong, or unhelpful. But when we are responding to others, we must be careful with our words, and actions. Ephesians 4 gives us a beautiful understanding on how we should approach, and love our brothers and sisters. V 25 states, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body." (NIV) So obviously the Bible is telling us that we can correct people that are wrong because we're "just being honest," right? Maybe not... It goes on to say in verse 29, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave you." NIV When we are interacting with other people, we must be careful that our words are chosen carefully, with the intention of building each other up, and pointing them towards Christ. It does not mean that we are to let everything go and pretend it's not wrong, but we have to decide if our actions or words in the moment are helpful and not hurtful. Here are some questions that are helpful towards deciding whether or not it is worth it to say something. Are we responding because of our own pride, or because we really think what they're doing is wrong? Do we have the relationship with this person where we can sharpen them, or are we just focused on "being right?" Are we addressing the actions of the other person, or are we attacking their character? In the end, we must be sure no matter what, to forgive others, because of the great forgiveness that has been shown to us through Jesus. Forgiveness and grace are instrumental in loving our neighbors, the way God has intended us to.

## *Family Church Small Group Study Guide* *Hospitable: Welcome Home*

### ***The Word –***

1 Thessalonians 2:8

(8) So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Matthew 5:14-16

(14) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

### ***Starting Point –***

Our ability to love our neighbors should not be perceived as a responsibility. In viewing neighboring as a command, or a sense of duty, we run the risk of mistaking our identity as an obligation. Instead, we have been called to embody love and, in doing so, become a reflection of the disposition of our Heavenly Father. As explained in *The Art of Neighboring*, "we don't love our neighbors to convert them, we love them because we are converted." The heart of a Christian should not rest in a compulsion to love through responsibility, but rather to love as a product of our character. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 demonstrates that our ability to be hospitable neighbors goes hand-in-hand with our desire to become invested in one another's lives. Relationships yield fruit in abundance within our lives and the lives of others, but only when we take the time to invest in them with a genuine heart. The blessing and curse of the perceptive nature of humans is that we can sniff out ulterior motives and false relationships with ease. The path to neighboring and to sharing our lives isn't always easy. It can be awkward, clunky, and strange as we work to build new relationships, but when we are genuine about who we are and leave room for Jesus to shine through our works, we give room for our neighbors to do the same. Through seizing the opportunity to find common ground and to build unity through sincere interactions, we are able to change strangers into friends and crowds into communities.

- Do you find it easy to share your story with people?
  - What obstacles keep you from opening yourself up to others?
  - How can you dispel these same types of obstacles in the lives of others?
- How can sharing your story help to ease the discomfort found in new relationships?

## ***A Church of Listeners –***

One of the biggest goals in neighboring is to build an environment of friendship and comfort. Through providing an example of security and belonging, we are able to demonstrate God’s design for a household in Christ. Lucius Annaeus Seneca explains that “one of the most beautiful qualities of true friendship is to understand and to be understood.” In the midst of our desire to welcome our neighbors home, we can’t forget that relationships are a two-way street. While we may uphold the role as the initiator of our newfound friendships, becoming too focused on sharing can very quickly lead to a failure to listen, in return. Healthy relationships thrive upon mutuality and the opportunity to grow together. James 1:19 says “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” This especially rings true for our new relationships; neighboring is NOT easy and can feel as if we aren’t making any progress. More often than not, the issue remains in our subconscious compulsion to dominate conversations and we completely overlook the easiest solution to the barriers of neighboring: asking our neighbors about their stories. William Carlos Williams explains that “What I know, I know of myself.” Simply put, the easiest conversation for people to have is to share their own experiences. Holding the same desire for our neighbors as described in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 opens opportunities for others to be equally interested in our story: it’s part of creating a foundation of trusting friendship.

- What changes do you believe might be seen if you were to ask others about their story before sharing your own?
  - What questions can you ask to help others share on a deeper level?
- What can you do to become a better listener?
  - How would these changes help to build stronger relationships?

## ***Weekly Challenge –***

Building a safe environment is the first step in sharing effective testimony. Matthew 5:14-16 teaches us to share our light with the world around us, a feat that becomes much easier when we approach others with a loving heart, a solid foundation of trust, and a desire to listen. Maya Angelou reflects upon society’s desire for belonging, sharing that “the ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.” A large part of our role as hosts is to not only welcome people home, but to hold the courage to say “come as you are.” The easiest way to find ourselves in meaningful relationships is to have better intentions than to force meaningful relationships. In other words, when we try too hard to build unnatural relationships, we often present caricatures of ourselves that don’t

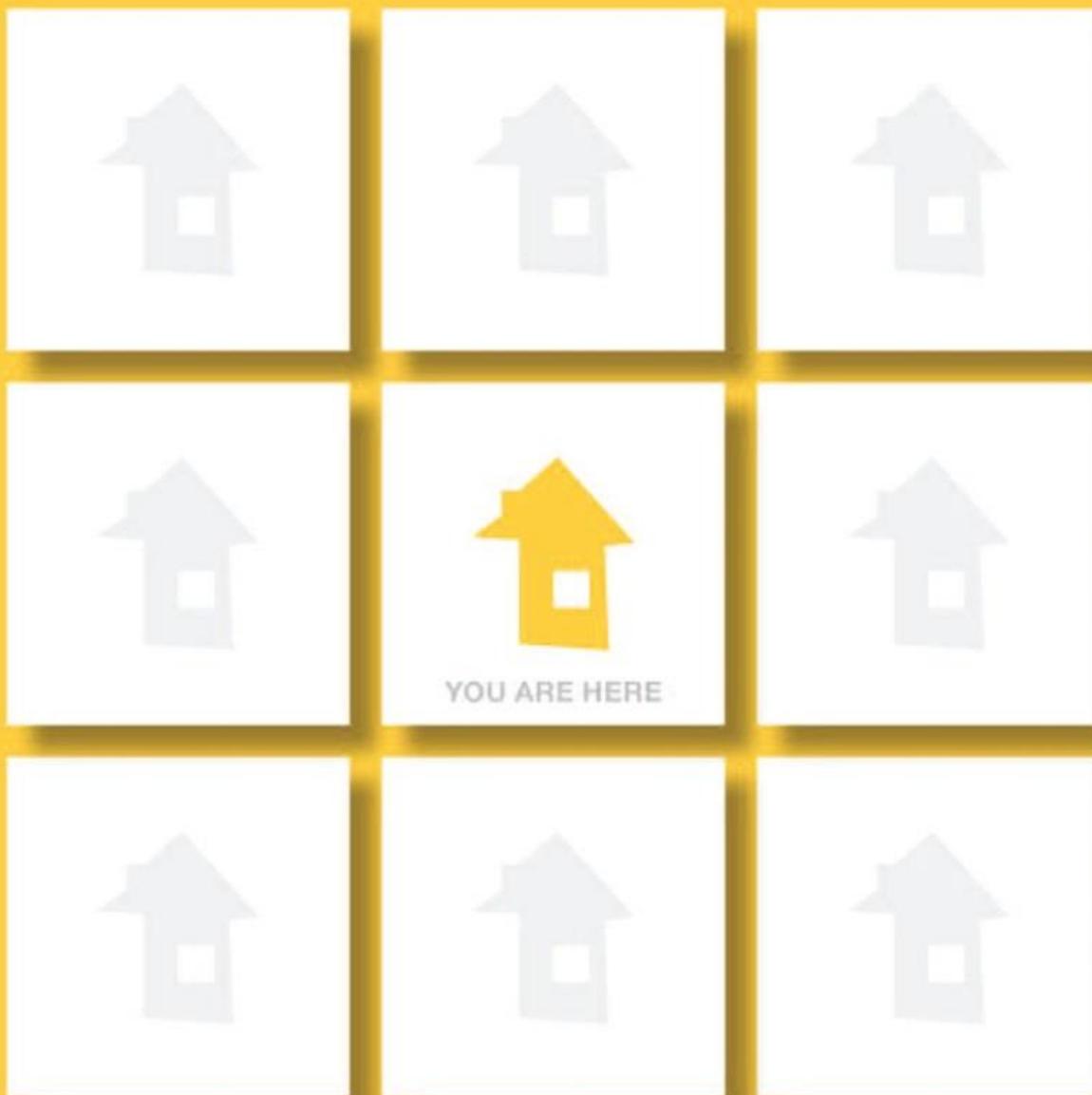
reflect who we truly are: our relationships become built on a façade instead of honest interaction. However, when we become intentional about creating a place where anyone can be themselves, genuine relationships are given the opportunity to grow naturally; we begin to trust one another and enjoy each other's company because of who we actually are instead of a mask being worn. In this way, as we hold the privilege of listening to and sharing testimony, we can remain resolute in trust and comfortable in relationships.

- What is your biggest fear or obstacle when it comes to sharing your testimony?
  - How different might this be if those you were sharing with were comfortable around you?
- Are you ever guilty of presenting an altered version of yourself to please the company you hold?
  - How does this change your demeanor and your ability to share your story?
  - What steps can you take to ensure that others can “be themselves” around you?
    - How might you have to change your current relational habits as a result?

*Don't forget to take time as a group to:*

1. Fill out your Block Map
2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.
3. Come up with one achievable goal that you can work toward over the next week.

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



### *Week Five Action Plan*

1. Follow up with your neighbors regarding struggles that you know they are having. Ask them how they are doing and offer your services.
2. Have a neighbor over for dinner or a game night with your family.
3. Share a personal struggle you are having with a neighbor. Ask them for help.

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 5*  
*Day 1*

***The Word -***

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

(9) But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

***In My Weakness -***

At our core, we are scared to expose what we cannot do. While we can come to terms with our natural inabilities, we frequently see our struggles as flaws rather than opportunities to broadcast God’s strength. However, as we have already discussed, humans were not designed to face challenges alone. Our personal limitations create room for God to not only move in our lives, but in the lives of our neighbors. Through our times of weaknesses, we will often need to reach out to the people God has placed in our lives. If we have been diligent throughout these past few weeks, our neighbors could be the very people God has called to lend a helping hand. In our times of trouble, calling upon our neighbors provides a unique opportunity to redefine our relationship. What has previously come to be a reciprocal bond of trust and respect can now stand as a manifested form of worship. We are able to praise God for our neighbors’ presence in our life and, in doing so, work to extend our view of one another through a lens of genuine thankfulness. When we use our weaknesses to promote God’s power, we can remain in worship within our relationships. God becomes rooted in the very fabric of our interactions.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

When is the last time you called upon your neighbor for help? Do you still worry about interrupting or inconveniencing others when you are struggling? Do you think your humility needs to change in order to advance your relationships?

*“Father, thank you for the limitations you have placed in our lives. Please use the “thorn in our side” to bring you glory and to magnify your name within our relationships and through our humility.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 5* *Day 2*

### ***The Word -***

Psalm 25:9

(9) He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.

### ***Reasoning -***

As we advance in the process of neighboring, we will be pressed to begin asking much harder questions. Growing deeper in our relationships typically encourages us to know one another beyond our names and hobbies. We construct stronger bonds when we are also able to relate to and understand how others think and feel, empathizing on behalf of circumstance as well as the thoughts they hold. In this process, our neighbors will grow to see and experience just how concrete our faith and convictions are. In some cases, in fear of driving non-believers away, Christians water down the source of their joy or principles. Our concern is that others may have been hurt in the past by people who condemned or judged in lieu of uplifted and loved. However, in attempting to hide the name of Jesus within our life, we can cause unintentional damage. Our capacity to build effective relationships all stems from the humble approach we have taken to God. In refusing to expose Him for the role he plays, we subconsciously deem ownership over God's design. Fear has the powerful ability to substitute ownership for servitude. However, if we have upheld what is right, remaining humble through our tasks in Neighboring, we should count it as a reward when people implore to know us deeper. We must remain in humility before the Lord so that we can more effectively recognize the path that we must follow and the credit we must give. In doing so, we give every reason for our neighbors to see through our actions to the very nature of God.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

Do you shy away from proclaiming Jesus' dominion over your actions? If they haven't already, what might learning about your faith lead your Neighbors to believe about Christianity strictly based upon your lifestyle?

*"Father, direct our decisions and humble us before you so that the way we conduct ourselves reflects positively upon your Kingdom and brings others to proclaim your glory."*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 5*  
*Day 3*

***The Word -***

Philippians 2:3

(3) Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

***Value Saver -***

When we take the time to honestly hold others above ourselves, our entire perception of relationships can change. We see an example of this every day in society's obsession with celebrities. The value that people place on their "heroes" leads them to cling to their words, advice, and dealings, so much so that it radically influences how they choose to conduct themselves. While the names on the "A-List" may not serve as the best role models, they do prove the point that assigning significance to an individual often impacts our life. Paul explains that this principle works the same way in our personal relationships. When we hold others more significant than ourselves, we become more willing to listen, eager to learn, and ready to engage. Altogether, by truly valuing our neighbors' role in our relationship we are made acutely aware of new opportunities to appreciate and serve them. Sometimes, what we say and what we mean don't always necessarily coincide, but our ability to focus on listening rather than simply hearing gives us the chance to recognize the needs of our neighbors and to celebrate in every chance to show them love.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

Do you give your neighbors an opportunity to speak more than you during conversations? Can you list qualities of each of your neighbors that you admire? Have you shared your admiration with them? How often do you celebrate your neighbors' victories?

*"Father, change our minds so that we may be quick to put others before ourselves. Help us to listen to, not simply hear, what our neighbors say so that we can celebrate in their successes and help in their troubles."*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 5*  
*Day 4*

***The Word -***

Isaiah 58:6-8

(6) “Is not this the fast that I choose: / to loose the bonds of wickedness, / to undo the straps of the yoke, / to let the oppressed go free, / and to break every yoke? // (7) Is it not to share your bread with the hungry / and bring the homeless poor into your house; / when you see the naked, to cover him, / and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? // (8) Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, / and your healing shall spring up speedily; / your righteousness shall go before you; / the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

***The Word -***

We can learn something about neighboring by observing the relationships that children hold with each other. They have a passionate desire to be closer and to get involved in the thought processes as well as the personal space of one another. Why? Because they want to intertwine what they say and what they think with what they do. Something changes in our adult lives. As much as we call each other friends and foster healthy relationships, we hold timidity at the thresholds of our doors so that majority of our interactions take place at the curb or through the phone. But God calls our love to include every aspect of our life. Closeness centers on our ability to let our words and actions echo our love for others. Isaiah explains that God’s glory is not manifested through good intentions, but in the act of sharing what we own, our hearts, and our personal space. We cannot effectively love from across the street, it takes walking side-by-side. When we invite others into our lives, we must be adamant about also inviting them into our homes – only then can we prove that we are who we say we are - even behind closed doors. When our relationships transcend beyond the streets to manifest at our dinner tables, we open the door for our neighbors to see new angles and aspects of who we are.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

How will inviting your neighbors to dinner change your relationships with them? How comfortable are you with hospitality? What might you need to improve?

*“Father, give us a desire to grow our hospitality and to offer our houses and personal space as a grounds to develop our neighboring relationships.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 5*

### *Day 5*

#### ***The Word -***

Romans 15:5-7

(5) May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, (6) that together you may with one voice glorify the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (7) Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

#### ***The Smallest Degree -***

When we choose to actively follow the Great Commandment, we trust that God will lead us in a direction which will yield harmonious living with our neighbors. Paul instructs us to welcome one another in obedience, but also explains that our task is only made possible when we lean into God's endurance and encouragement. We should be aware that the art of Neighboring is a marathon, not a sprint. Being cognizant of God's will for our neighborhoods demands for us to continuously check to see if our actions align with the plan He holds for our neighborhoods. If you were to watch the pilot of an airplane while he steers an aircraft, you would see that a vast majority of his job requires him to make small adjustments in order to stay on course. The smallest degree of change in-flight could mean the difference between landing an airplane in Canada rather than Chicago. The same is true in God's desire for our communities. It's imperative that we hold fast to the ways in which God calls us to welcome and the endurance he grants for us to do so. If we aren't careful, we can become so focused on the task at hand that we lose track of the reason behind our work. As we uphold our call to hospitality, we must remain true to the heart of our relationships. Pursuing peace without God is simply compromise, but harmony through Christ allows Him to be glorified.

#### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

What is God's plan for your Neighborhood? How does your current task fit into the bigger picture of what he desires? Are you working to compromise or harmonize in your relationships?

*"Father, gift us the endurance and encouragement we need in order to fulfill your will to create a harmonious neighborhood and show us what changes must be made in order to bring your name glory."*

*From the Family:*  
*Thoughts by Bethany Stewart*

Part of my coveted quiet time with God consists of an early morning brisk walk a couple times a week along a nearby desert floodplain. The arroyo is covered in small desert bushes and a few trees. Coyotes, rabbits, and birds take refuge in the brush throughout the year, but in the dry, brittle desert winter, shelter from the harsh, cold wind is scarce. Most plants have lost their leaves and daily sustenance can be a challenge to find. The Lord often speaks to me through nature and I enjoy discovering the beauty and sometimes, destitution of His creation.

One morning walk, I walked passed two large bushes about 50 feet apart. Both bushes stood about 10 feet tall towering over the smaller brushes below. Planted in the same soil, both in a wide open desert field, one had succumbed to the desert winter. Its branches were bare, prickly and brittle. Its bark was gray with signs of winter's death. The second towering bush appeared as though it was still in Spring! With its branches dark and its leaves green, it reveled in the light of the sun bursting with life.

How could two of the same species of bush, planted in the same soil, under the same conditions have such very different livelihoods?

As I pondered and asked God why, two coyotes saw me from afar and ran to the life-filled tree. Sheltered by its lush branches, I could no longer see them. They sought refuge under that safe umbrella. Days later, I saw several rabbits escape my gaze into that bush and birds flock to its limbs. It was then that the Lord asked me which bush I most resembled.

Dumbstruck by the question, the Lord brought to mind Jeremiah 17: 7-8 which says, "(7) "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD. (8) He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Even in a dry, waterless, desert winter, this bush was bearing fruit! Because of its “fruit”, all creatures were drawn to it for safety, shelter, refuge and food. When my life resembles a dry, desert winter, when discouragement, trouble, sickness, challenges, or loss come my way, do I lose trust in the Lord and my hope falters? Or in these difficult times, do I remember God’s faithfulness and continue to hope and take hold of the joy that comes from a life reliant on our Savior? Do my roots find their sure anchor in the promises of God found in His Word?

You see, when we bear fruit and are full of life even in the desert times, people see it. Our friends, co-workers and neighbors see our responses to the injustices of this present day and they will either be drawn to us because of the hope we display or they will find their refuge elsewhere. It does not mean that we do not face hardship. Romans 8:35-39 tells us we most assuredly will face trouble! However, it also says that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ and that He, our victorious Savior, has already overcome the world. This is our beautiful hope....this is why we can face trials with joy and this is why the world should be drawn to us!

## *Family Church Small Group Study Guide* *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*

### **The Word –**

1 Kings 17:8-16

(8) Then the word of the Lord came to him, (9) “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” (10) So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” (11) And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” (12) And she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” (13) And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. (14) For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.’” (15) And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. (16) The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

### **Starting Point –**

Our capacity to love our neighbors finds root in faithful obedience to God. Nevertheless, hearing and remaining attentive to God’s plans requires follow-through and practice to stay present in the moment. It can be surprising how quickly our minds begin to stray, focusing on *what comes next* rather than *what’s happening now*. Elisabeth Elliot describes it this way, “Does it make sense to pray for guidance about the future if we are not obeying in the thing that lies before us today? How many momentous events in Scripture depend on one person’s seemingly small act of obedience! Rest assured: Do what God tells you to do now, and, depend upon it, you will be shown what to do next.” When we are obedient to God, we become fruitful in our relationships because we leave room for Him to work. It is far more important to acknowledge the hand that holds the future than it is to worry about what the future holds. In worrying about things to come, we are more inclined to live a closed-handed lifestyle and, by doing so, cannot serve our neighbors like we are called to do. It would have been easy for the widow to tell Elijah that she could not spare any food in 1 King 17, succumbing to the fear that what she had would not last

for the days to come. Yet, through her obedience, in the midst of dire circumstances, God provided for the future. Obedience yields prosperity. As we extend an invitation to our neighbors, inviting them to dinner, our homes, and our lives, we cannot expect to remain obedient to God, let alone to allow room for Him to move, if our actions are molded by a *what comes next* mentality.

- What fears will you have to hand over to God that are currently keeping you from focusing on the present?
  - How could these obstacles keep you from remaining obedient?
  - How might they keep you from becoming a better neighbor?
- Is planning for the future a bad thing?
  - Why or why not?

### ***Clear a Chair for Humility –***

It would have been easy for God to provide for Elijah in a different manner, one in which Elijah wouldn't have to ask the widow for food. Instead, God chose an option that not only forced Elijah to call for help, but enabled him to form a relationship through a stance of humility and relatability. God seeks to grow our relationships so that his love may be exposed. As we become intertwined within the lives of our neighbors, our ability to approach God's will from a place of humility allows us to trust that His plan will be better than anything we could have done. Remaining humble keeps us present and attentive to the people who live right next to us. We would be naïve to not acknowledge the fact that we all have troubles, but even more so if we refused to help one another through them. The mentality for a lot of people, if left unchecked, can begin to lean toward the idea that we are the only ones who have anything to offer. This concept, also referred to as "paternalism," fosters the illusion that our relationships should be one-sided, with us consistently extending the helping hand. In reality, true friendship is reciprocal. Part of forming genuine relationships with our neighbors requires us to expose our own weaknesses and needs. It is unfair for us to continuously place others on the receiving end of help because, in doing so, we are actually robbing our friends of the opportunity to contribute fully to the relationship. We all have needs and struggles – it's part of what makes us human – and sharing those struggles allows us to grow closer in our weakness. Just as we have been placed in our neighbor's lives by God to offer our hand, they have been placed in our lives to do the same. Creating space for others and welcoming them to the table actually means summoning the courage to share the good AND the bad.

- Do you find it easier to offer help or to receive it? Why?
  - How do you feel when you are able to help and serve other people?
    - Might that feeling be reciprocal for those who want to help you?
- Why might it be difficult to ask or receive help?

## ***Weekly Challenge –***

We were not designed to go through life alone. Similarly, we were not designed to bear the weight of relationships on our own shoulders. The Bible states in Proverbs 27:17, “as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” We are guaranteed to find that our neighbors have a wide breadth of knowledge and unique skills to bring to the table, if only we first invite them *to* the table. Most people will jump at the opportunity to use their talents for others, it’s just up to us to humble ourselves enough to request a helping hand. The difference between being a good neighbor and being a great neighbor lies in our ability to share in the joy of mutually serving and growing within the relationship. Elijah stands as the perfect example of how God uses our vulnerabilities to change lives. *The Art of Neighboring* touches upon this issue, explaining that “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.” With humility and obedience, we hold the ingredients to transform our relationships, giving God the opportunity to use us and our neighbors together to strengthen the bonds within the Kingdom.

- What issues or needs do you currently have that a neighbor could assist you with?
  - What has kept you from asking them?
  - If the role were to be reversed, how willing would you be to help your neighbor?
- How well do you know your neighbors’ passions and skills?
  - Would knowing these things bring you closer to their life?
  - How?

*Don’t forget to take time as a group to:*

1. Fill out your Block Map
2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.
3. Come up with one achievable goal that you can work toward over the next week.

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



### **Week Six Action Plan**

1. If you haven't already followed-through with a Block Party, consult your neighbors to plan an event together.
2. Ask your neighbors about the issues of your neighborhood. Brainstorm ways you can partner with them to promote change.
3. Create a personal Neighboring action plan for the weeks that follow this campaign.

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 6* *Day 1*

### ***The Word -***

1 Peter 3:8

(8) Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

### ***Getting Global -***

Imagine what would be possible in a world of unity. If we were able to share the same heart for one another and goals within our societies, our world would be able to tackle even the biggest problems. Wars would cease to exist, the homeless would be cared for, world hunger would be solved; global unity is easily the best solution to every current world issue. It's easy to write this possibility off as a dream rather than a possibility, even in the midst of neighboring. We hold aspirations of changing our neighborhoods, but can confuse our progress as an isolated effort, confined to our small corner of the world. But we are doing much more than involving ourselves in the lives around us, we are actually equipping others to continue the charge. The humility we present to our neighbors and the outpouring of love that results, if we remain diligent, will stand to unify our neighborhoods in an infectious way. Often, people see and pursue what is possible based upon what already exists. Only by forming influential bonds can others start to recognize the merit of truly knowing their neighbors, as well. Unity under our roof becomes a contagious environment for those who have had the pleasure of experiencing the benefits of sharing our homes and our lives. When we reach a point in our relationships where we truly offer our house as a home to all, God illuminates our neighborhoods as an example of what unity can achieve.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

How influential has your neighboring effort been to others in the community? Though we have been spending most of our time focusing on our immediate neighbors, has this initiative begun to extend outside of your eight-house radius? How can you ensure that it does?

*“Father, ignite a fire in us that we may spread your love across the world. Grant us an open door so that we may be your hands and promote unity through every chance we get to sympathize, love, and serve.”*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 6*  
*Day 2*

***The Word -***

1 Timothy 5:1-2

(1) Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, (2) older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

***Welcome to the Family-***

So far, we have been able to emphasize the importance of recognizing humility within ourselves and our neighbors and the need to meet humbleness with encouragement. Actively looking for ways to reassure continues to build our neighbors up to an identity God calls them to maintain. Through everything, the purity of our intentions reflects the purity of our family. God does not call us to simply make new friends throughout this process, he desires us to use our friends to allow the Earth to echo the Kingdom – and within the kingdom, we are a family in Christ. Choosing to encourage our neighbors, loving them as we would our own brothers and sisters, provides the opportunity to inspire a sense of inclusion: and through inclusion comes unity. Neighboring exemplifies new ways in which the people around us can recognize the positive role that they have within the community. They believe they belong under our roof because they have helped to build it. Through understanding identity, we draw even closer to understanding how we can be used to promote change and to unify as one family.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

How aware are your neighbors of the importance they hold in your life? In your neighborhood? How can sharing this with them inspire a heightened sense of personal identity within their relationships?

*“Father, encourage us so that we may do the same, leading your people to understand their identity and to embrace the powerful role that you have called them to uphold. Continue to help us to do the same.”*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 6*  
*Day 3*

***The Word –***

Galatians 6:2

(2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

***Divine Purpose –***

We began this campaign by addressing that God has placed in our neighborhoods for very specific reasons. The relationships that we have begun to build and the lives God has placed in our paths are a testament to the divine plan God provided for us within our neighborhoods. In drawing near to the end of our campaign, it is important to acknowledge, once again, that God's hand is firmly planted in where we live. Each neighborhood is bound to hold its own unique issues that can only be overcome by those who witness and experience them daily. Each neighborhood is unique, just as each relationship is bound to be unique. Because of this, the burdens we are called to bear within our neighborhoods create a unique bond. Through our neighboring efforts, overcoming adversity becomes specific, promoting change in the things that had previously come to plague our communities. Unity comes when we are able to address our neighborhood's issues together, sharing in the responsibilities of one another, but it is solidified when we are able to recognize and celebrate the transformation. We have been placed in our community for a reason, and the issues that haunt our streets reside in the same manner – to fulfill God's will through harmony.

***Reflection and Prayer –***

What problems has your neighborhood come to recognize as pressing issues? How can you use your relationships to address these concerns and promote change?

*“Father, fuel our hearts so that we do not sit idly by in the wake of problems, but instead choose to rise up within the community and invite others to do the same.”*

## *Neighboring Devotional: Week 6* *Day 4*

### ***The Word -***

2 Peter 1:5-7

(5) For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, (6) and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, (7) and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

### ***Pursuit of Growth -***

The further we invest ourselves in our relationships, the more we reveal about who we are and how we are able to love our neighbors. Earlier we explained that the act of neighboring is a marathon, not a sprint. Throughout this process we should come to recognize that our pursuit of godliness is also an ever-evolving process. Progress in our efforts within the community should also run parallel to the progress we are making in our faith; the two go hand-in-hand. The quickest way to check whether you are following God's plan in your neighborhood is to ask if you can see personal, spiritual growth in your efforts. If we remain complacent with the way that things are, we will not put in the effort required to see a positive change. Neighboring is not intended to be a quick fix for a society's problems, but rather, a permanent change that begins from our Christ-centered homes and finds foundation in love. This means that we must remain diligent, taking the initiative to supplement intentions and beliefs for actions and persistence so that all things may come to relate to our growing godliness. Only then can we, and our neighborhoods, remain adamant in seeking to be used for the good of our cities.

### ***Reflection and Prayer -***

How is your spiritual journey since you have started neighboring? Have you grown closer to God in the process? What qualities in 2 Peter might you need to focus on in your walk with God and in your walk with neighboring?

*"Father, show us where we need to grow in our faith and expose us to new ways in which we can use our relationships to draw closer to you."*

*Neighboring Devotional: Week 6*  
*Day 5*

***The Word -***

1 Peter 4:8

(8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

***Back to the Beginning -***

While church programs and devotionals serve to equip and inspire us in our daily walk, who we are on our own time is what truly counts. We began this neighboring campaign as a way to focus on loving our neighbors and entertaining the process of actually taking the Great Commandment literally. As the six weeks come to a close, our responsibility to continue pursuing genuine relationships with our neighbors remains. We hope that you took this initiative to heart. As is the case with most processes, our results become more significant based upon the effort that we give. It helps to have a source which holds us accountable as the next few weeks (or months or years) offer daily opportunities to dive even deeper into our neighborhoods and communities. But, at the end of the day, the Great Commandment falls upon our shoulders, and our ability to move forward requires us to continue taking steps. We are given the command to “keep loving one another earnestly.” When we don’t know what our next move should be, it helps to go back to the beginning, acknowledging and dwelling in the root of all success, the reason for our salvation, and the source of our motivation: love. We are living examples of what God’s love can do and -through our obedience – are able to work to bring about what God’s love *will* do. Our life began anew when our sins were forgiven, covered by love. This is the perfect place to begin each day. An earnest love is determined, resolute, consuming, inspiring, hopeful, peaceful, adamant, desirous, and always seeking to grow. It is a reflection of our intentions, the fuel for our actions, and the change we wish to see. Love is the lifestyle of the Kingdom, and through it we bring glory to God. With praise and thankfulness, love IS the only place to begin.

***Reflection and Prayer -***

What next steps do you plan to take within your neighborhood? Are there certain issues you feel that God is calling you to address? What about certain neighbors that you wish to grow closer to? What is your plan to stay resilient in your neighboring initiative?

*“Father, inspire us to carry forward with your commands. Fuel our desire to love and love deeper, revealing to us the path you wish for us to take in the upcoming days, weeks, and years.”*

*From the Family:*  
*Thoughts by Bethany Stewart*

Has God ever told you to say something to a perfect stranger? Has He ever hastened your heart to walk up to someone and say, “God wants you to know that He loves you!” Have you ever followed through and found yourself in the midst of a miracle?

When I do my morning walks, I try to follow the same familiar trails knowing I have little time to complete my exercise before having to pick up my preschooler. Last November, I walked passed an elderly woman and felt a strong sensation that God was asking me to tell her that He loves her deeply and has a great affection for her. I found myself saying out loud, “That’s AWKWARD, God! She doesn’t know me....You must be joking.” So instead of telling her what the Holy Spirit was prompting me, I simply said, “Good morning.” and passed on by.

The following week, I saw her again heading up a small hill, the wind at her back. And as the same wind graced my face, I heard the Holy Spirit say again, “Tell her I love her.” Again, I passed her with a simple, “Good morning.” However, this time I felt saddened and disappointed. I was being disobedient to God. I walked home asking God why this simple task was so hard for me and prayed that he would give me the courage to speak to this dear lady the next time I saw her.

A week or two went by and while I had courage to speak God’s Words of love to the woman, she was nowhere to be found. I even asked God if maybe He got it wrong and I could give the message to another passerby, but the Lord was clear who this message belonged to. Again my heart sank as I struggled with my disobedience. Perhaps I would never see her again and I had missed the opportunity to clearly share a message of hope. In early January, I walked my familiar trail and was three quarters finished when there, in the distance, the little woman, bundled up to shield herself from the blistering wind, was walking my way.

I asked the Lord to give me courage. I was ready this time. I pulled out my earbuds, took off my sunglasses and approached asking, “Do you walk here often?” Oh, dear, I thought! What is this.....a pickup line? But she politely, while trying to continue walking passed, answered, “once in a while....” I could tell she was a little caught off guard by my sudden need for conversation so I went straight to the point. “I walk here often and since November, God has laid you on my heart and He wants you to know that He deeply loves you, has great affection for you and has not forgotten you.” Whew....I said it. But what happened next caught ME off guard.

The little woman began to cry. Her eyes were wells and the tears just would not stop. And then I cried. She began to share that she used to pray and even bring her rosary on her walk, but after her young adult son had returned from military duty, a healthy promising young man, he died suddenly of an aneurysm. The result was incredible grief that left her angry and distant from God. Whoa.

God had been pursuing her, clearly! We had an amazing time talking about God and His plans for her. She let me pray for her and we went on to complete our walks. I could not get out of my mind the kindness and unshakable love of God....that He would relentlessly bring her to my mind every walk and that He spoke so directly to her in her vulnerability. He desires relationship with her. I felt so convicted that I had not spoken to her sooner and asked for forgiveness for my disobedience. God, in His gracious way, reminded me that He knew that I would be disobedient and that it would take me two months to deliver His message. I prayed that He would remind me of this encounter the next time I tried to ignore His voice.

He reminded me of 2 Timothy 4:2 which says, “(1) I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

The Word that Paul is telling us to preach is much simpler than I make it....God deeply loves us, desires relationship with us, and continually pursuing us. This message opens the door to repentance and trust in Christ Jesus, the God who has saved us.

*Family Church Small Group Study Guide*  
*Mi Casa, Su Casa*

***The Word –***

Acts 2: 44-47

(44) And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (45) And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (46) And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Psalms 133:1-3

(1) Behold, how good and pleasant it is // when brothers dwell in unity! // (2) It is like the precious oil on the head, // running down on the beard, // on the beard of Aaron, // running down on the collar of his robes! // (3) It is like the dew of Hermon, // which falls on the mountains of Zion! // For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, // life forevermore.

***Starting Point –***

What would it look like if the Church of today shared the vision and heart of the original Church in Acts? It's easy to write-off the possibility of maintaining a similar lifestyle, stating that culture and society has "changed and evolved" too much. This same way of thinking leads us to our homes, shutting the door on the lives of those in our neighborhoods. In many ways, we exchange Godly principle for a mistaken pursuit of individuality. Author, John Bytheway, observes that "Everyone would like to have stronger faith. By themselves, the scriptures may not strengthen your faith, but being faithful to what they teach, does. In other words, faith cannot be separated from faithfulness." We were designed to be a body of believers who takes God at his word, following the example he has set for our communities through the Great Commandment. When we come together in unity, we establish collective purpose and uphold a precedent of common good. Our capacity to love and to build unity is the key to evoking true change in our neighborhoods. As Psalm 133 explains, unity is the gateway to God's blessing. Through neighboring, through faithfulness, and through common vision, we share a heart with one another that matches the heart of our Father.

- How might our perception of the Church change if it acted like the Church in Acts?
  - Would this be possible in today's society? Why or why not?
- What sort of obstacles and fears keep you from offering more to the Church?
  - What about to your neighbors?
  - Would overcoming these obstacles help to build stronger relationships?

### ***Individuality Together –***

The current state of society is fixated on defining who we are based upon what we own. We are divided into classes based on income, education, and ownership. But, living with a *mine is yours* mentality realigns our perception of ownership, requiring us to acknowledge that everything we have can be used to further the gospel. When we recognize what God has graciously given to us, we are more prepared to let Him use those things to implement his plans; our open hand to God reflects an open hand to our neighbors and communities. Pursuing a lifestyle of *mine is yours* entails us to summon the boldness to daily be defined by what God can do rather than what we have – a paradigm shift away from individualism toward unity. Now, it is important to note that individuality is not to be synonymous of independence. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12 that “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” Whereas individuality allows us to embrace our unique design within our society, individualism works to separate us because of dissimilarity; it is the difference between pursuing our talents and using our talents to pursue others. Identity without community serves to only further isolate our lives, but originality in conjunction with others leads to unity and the blessings of God.

- How do you see individuality affect the way you live?
  - What about individualism?
- How do you approach the opportunity to interact with people who are different from you?
  - Is it easier or harder to form relationships through this difference?
- In what ways can we work toward unity when we encounter a difference of perspective?

### ***Weekly Challenge –***

We long to see Christ exalted through the nations and to bear witness to a global reformation centered upon the Gospel. God's love for the world should not sit as a stagnant hope within the walls of our local churches, but consistently present a call to

action for every believer. Unity can only be achieved one step at a time: lucky for us, our neighbors are simply a few steps away. Change begins right next door. By God's design, we have been called to be a community of togetherness. We stand as beacon to our cities as a church that invests in our neighborhoods and allows our lives to become intertwined. Sheri L. Dew explains that "Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other. Thus, no marriage or family, no ward or stake is likely to reach its full potential until husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, men and women work together in unity of purpose, respecting and relying upon each other's strengths." We are better together, blessed through unity, and celebratory in our individuality. Neighboring requires us to acknowledge our fears, embrace humility, and sacrifice our time. It makes us step outside of our comfort zones, to listen as a means of growing closer, and to expose our flaws so that others may shine. Our model for relationships, and for the heart of God's people, is summed up by Jon Katz in this way – "I think if I've learned anything about friendship, it's to hang in, stay connected, fight for them, and let them fight for you. Don't walk away, don't be distracted, don't be too busy or tired, and don't take them for granted. Friends are part of the glue that holds life and faith together." In everything, The Art of Neighboring requires us to actively pursue the culture found in Acts 2 and to, once more, become the Church.

As Christians, let us continue in our pursuit of a community built upon *the rock*. Let our house become open to all and known throughout our nations, our communities, and our neighborhoods as the house of the Lord. Let us become neighbors, once again, proclaiming "life forevermore."

- What comes next for you?

*As our Neighboring campaign comes to a close, we hope you take some time as a group to reflect upon your experience. What changes have you seen in your life, your relationships, and your neighborhoods? Use the conclusion of this small group as an opportunity to discuss how you might be able to continue with your efforts and to establish accountability (use our weekly exercises as inspiration to discuss what you and your group can do as next steps for the months to come).*

1. Fill out your Block Map
2. Identify one neighbor that you are going to pray for during the next week. Take time to pray in the group for the neighbors that were mentioned.
3. Come up with one achievable goal that you can work toward over the next week.

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

