

Authentic Neighbors

Called to Love Your Neighbor: Luke 10:25-37

January 7, 2018

NOTE TO LEADER

Happy New Year! It's great to start a new year building community together. We want you to know that Q5 for this series may, as the weeks progress, bring up unsettling feelings or discussion, and that's okay. We are praying the Spirit will work to reveal our call to hospitality, to build relationships across differences. As always, thank you for giving of yourself to build up the body of Christ.

Warmly,
The CG Directors

SERIES SCHEDULE

1. Loving Your Neighbor	Luke 10:25-37
2. Loving Your Enemy	Luke 6:27-36
3. Practicing Hospitality	Luke 14:12-24
4. Loving Generously	Acts 4:32-37
5. Loving Across Difference	Acts 8:26-40

Want to continue meditating on Scripture throughout the week? Consider using the Redeemer Devotional daily email.
redeemer.com/devotional

OVERVIEW

As we begin the first sermon series of 2018, Authentic Neighbors, you might wonder: "Why are we talking about being neighbors? Is it even realistic to 'love your neighbor'?" The case for being a good neighbor begins with creation, when God made humans in his image and said that everything he created was good. Even though humans turned away from God, bringing sin, discord, poverty and death into the world, they still bear the image of God. As a result, we echo the words of C. S. Lewis in *The Weight of Glory*, "There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal." The people you see every day, even the ones to whom you give little regard, will live forever either reconciled to God or separated from him.

Since humans are image bearers, how we treat other people indicates how we value God. The Authentic Neighbors series will explore historical accounts of Jesus' life from the New Testament books of Luke and Acts. Luke, the author of both books, demonstrates that justice is at the heart of Christianity, because it reflects the character of God who "works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed" (Psalm 103:6) and offers holistic restoration to humanity, who desperately needs renewal in every sphere of life—physically, spiritually and relationally, with God, themselves, each other and nature itself. Therefore, Christians, because of what Jesus has done, affirm the dignity of all people and seek justice for those in our communities who are marginalized and oppressed.

We will also explore the practice of Christian hospitality, which Redeemer defines as regularly inviting people, especially those who are different from us, into our lives through the sharing of time, attention and resources. Hospitality is a foundational part of being a good neighbor. Through avenues of hospitality, we cultivate a posture of openness and mutuality toward those who are different from us and those who may be marginalized.

PURPOSE & WORSHIP

10 MINUTES

Remind the group of why you are meeting: To experience Christ Jesus in our midst ministering to us and through us to one another so that our lives are changed. Then in anticipation and response to that, take time to open the group with worship by reading the following verse and then having someone pray.

"The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it" (Revelation 21:23-24).

SCRIPTURE

Luke 10:25-37 New International Version (NIV)

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."



INTRODUCTION

As we discuss the topic of loving and showing mercy to our neighbor, we begin with an understanding of how justice reflects the character of God and demonstrates the essence of the gospel. There are two parts to the definition of “neighbor.” The English word “neighbor” means the person who is “nigh” (near) you. Neighbors are people besides your family that you regularly see face to face, due to daily proximity. In Hebrew the word “neighbor” (*saken*) refers to “one who resides in a geographically proximate relationship to another.” In many ways, neighbors are everyone around us. *A neighbor is someone near you but not just like you. Near, yet different.*

In this passage Jesus confirms and clarifies the Old Testament commands to love those around us by calling it one of the two great commandments. But who is our neighbor and what are the requirements of love and mercy? Some thought the word “neighbor” meant people who were racially, culturally and socially like them. Essentially, it meant one could choose to love or ignore neighbors based on what pleased them or promoted their interests rather than based on our common bond as God’s image-bearers.

Jesus responds to this injustice with the famous parable of the Good Samaritan. A law expert asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor? Define ‘neighbor!’” (Luke 10:29). In response, Jesus tells a story about a Samaritan who shows the comprehensive love and mercy of God to a Jew in need, even as his fellow Jews pass him by.

GOAL FOR TODAY’S DISCUSSION

To consider how God’s comprehensive, radical love for us empowers Christ’s followers to show this love to everyone.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

20 Minutes Q1-4, 20 Minutes Q5

1. In light of the Bible’s teaching on what it is to be a good neighbor (see Introduction and Scripture), what does it mean to be a “neighbor” in today’s context? What is unique to our setting in New York City as we consider this call?

- ▶ Being attentive to those who around us and their needs, especially those on the margins.
- ▶ Going out of our way and taking risks, even at great cost to ourselves, to help someone in need, particularly people different than ourselves. .
- ▶ Helping someone in need without regard to whether or not they are “deserving.”
- ▶ Intentionally inviting others into our lives, especially those across barriers of race, socioeconomic status, background, or religious beliefs.

- ▶ Providing for people in ways that restore them more fully, instead of giving just enough to appease our consciences.

2. In verse 29, the expert of the law asks Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?,” in order to “justify himself.” How does his question serve to justify him or to avoid the spirit of the law? In what ways do we justify ourselves when it comes to loving people near us but not like us?

- ▶ He wanted to identify exactly who he had a moral obligation to love (versus those he could ignore).
- ▶ He wanted to justify his belief that his “neighbor” was one who was morally worthy, ethnically similar or religiously devout like him.
- ▶ He wanted to reassure himself of his own righteousness by being able to say that he had, indeed, loved everyone who qualified as his neighbor.
- ▶ In similar ways, we tend to interact with only those who we deem morally worthy, ethnically similar, religiously devout or socioeconomically comparable to us.

3. Both the priest and the Levite had an obligation to remain ceremonially clean in order to perform necessary religious rites for their community, so they “could not help.” Yet at the same time they rejected the command to love their neighbor. They must have thought “I cannot help, but someone else really should.” How does the same thing happen today?

- ▶ As a group, get to the heart and to specific practicalities about what it would look like to invite into our lives people who we tend to leave on the margins.
- ▶ Choose to pay attention and even stop for the need of another (relational, financial, safety). When, on a consistent basis, our pursuits are too important to get sidetracked with helping someone in need, we are not hospitable.
- ▶ Choose to take a step toward someone on the margins in your life. Invite someone different into your life or home.
- ▶ Realize that while you can choose to serve other groups of people, those who are near you (at work or in your neighborhood) are there for a reason.
- ▶ Connect someone in need to other “experts” if they need special care.

4. Read the quote below. Summarize, then discuss. How do these insights encourage Christians to follow the pattern of Jesus, the Great Samaritan? How does it motivate you to take a step toward others, especially those across ethnic or socioeconomic barriers?



Jesus...was asking each listener [who were all Jews] to imagine himself to be a victim of violence, dying, with no hope if this [despised] Samaritan did not stop and help...Jesus was saying something like this: “What if your only hope was to get ministry from someone who not only did not owe you any help—but who actually owed you the opposite? What if your only hope was to get free grace from someone who had every justification, based on your relationship to him, to trample you?...Jesus is the Great Samaritan to whom the Good Samaritan points...Once we receive this ultimate, radical neighbor love through Jesus, we can start to be the neighbors that the Bible calls us to be.¹

- ▶ The only source for living a life of radical hospitality centers on us receiving Jesus’ love, in order to be the neighbors we are called to be.
- ▶ Everyone is our neighbor, and we must love our neighbor as we have been loved. Jesus defines love as meeting relational, material, physical and economic needs through acts of kindness.
- ▶ Love is not just sentimental; it is commitment and action. Jesus, as the Great Samaritan to whom this parable points, relocated from the glories of heaven to lowliness on earth in order to demonstrate God’s love to humans—who are so utterly different, morally unworthy and spiritually bankrupt.
- ▶ Love costs more than we naturally would give, especially to a stranger or someone very different than ourselves. So when we experience the cost, we share more deeply the love and mercy of Christ.
- ▶ Real love entails risk. We will need to give up other parts of our lives to practice hospitality. We will need to reorder priorities and more deeply trust that God will provide for us so that we can give from his unlimited resources.

FORMATION PRACTICE EXERCISE

5. Redeemer defines hospitality as: *Regularly inviting people, especially those who are different from us, into our lives through the sharing of time, attention and resources. The practice of hospitality cultivates a posture of openness, mutuality and welcome across difference in all of life.*

- ▶ How does your real-life definition of hospitality compare and contrast to the one given above?
- ▶ Share a time when you have been warmly welcomed. What were the circumstances, and how did you respond to this act of hospitality? Reflect on the ways God has welcomed you into a new life, which points to a future eternal home.

Hospitality application during the coming week:

- ▶ Give particular attention to someone near you, either in your neighborhood or office, who you do not normally invite into your life. Consider doing the following:

¹ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 74.

- ▶ Pray for that person every day.
- ▶ Initiate a new step with him or her based on your current relationship (i.e. strike up a conversation, invite for coffee, etc.).
- ▶ Next week share with your group what you've learned through this practice.

FELLOWSHIP AND SHARING

15 MINUTES

- ▶ Catch one another up on your lives so we can celebrate, thank God, and share challenges that need prayer.

PRAYER²

15 MINUTES

Each week during the Authentic Neighbor series, we will pray for a different group of people within our city. This week, pray for the homeless:

- ▶ *For all the men, women and children who have no place to call home.*
- ▶ *For the removal of any physical or emotional barriers homeless individuals face in finding stable housing.*
- ▶ *That men and women would find shelter that would help them feel known, loved and dignified.*

- ▶ *Wonder what your next step in spiritual formation is? Consider getting involved at Redeemer through membership: redeemer.com/membership*

² These prayers are based on the Hope for New York Prayer Guide. See your **online Redeemer account's resources page** for the full guide.