

Adventures in Neighboring

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

- When I was a kid we didn't have Nickelodeon or Disney Chanel.
- We had PBS and this guy named Mr. Rogers.
- He'd walk onto the set with the camera rolling.
- And while he's singing this song he was changing his clothes.
- He'd take off his suit coat and put on a cardigan sweater.
- He'd take off his penny loafer dress shoes and put on his lace up blue canvas tennis shoes.
- And the grand finale was, "WOULD YOU BE MINE, OULD YOU BE MINE, WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?"
- Mr. Rogers Neighborhood always comes to mind when I think about neighbors.
- That show influenced millions of people who watched it growing up (and some are still in counseling).
- We're starting a new series about our neighbors and we're going to be challenging everyone in our church to up their game in the good neighbor department.
- Some of you live out on the farm, but most of us live in neighborhoods or apartments and we have neighbors.
- I remember a little old lady who lived in the mint green duplex across the street from my childhood home.
- Even though it pains me to admit it; I have to confess my favorite neighbor of all time was a gal named Mrs. Beaver. It's true.
- She had a little glass bowl of candy, and she invited us to knock on the door anytime if we wanted candy; **which was always!**
- She was in her 80s, was a lonely widow, and a very nice lady.
- But that might not sound safe today.
- We don't think about neighbors like we used to. We're more suspicious, more private, more guarded in our relationships.
- According to one study 50% of Americans don't know the names of their immediate neighbors.
- People who have studied this phenomenon suggest a couple of reasons why this is true.
- We could all suspect the **internet** era for being partly responsible.
- People can get online, get on their smart phones, and interact with the people they choose, instead of the people they live by.
- But sociologists point out that not knowing your neighbors actually traces back more directly to the widespread use of **cars**.
- When people got mobile, they could drive somewhere to see family or friends.
- Another cause is our great concern for the **safety** of our children.
- Every time a child is harmed we hear it about because of our instant access to horrible stories around the world.
- As a result our kids don't go out and play, and interact with other kids in the neighborhood, as much as they used to.

- We could speculate all day about what has caused anonymous neighbor phenomenon, but it's more important that we address it
- And here's why: Jesus died on the cross for our neighbors.
- One of my neighbors is a single-guy who pulls out of his garage every morning around 5:45am and gives me a wave.
- In the afternoon he pulls up, the garage doors opens up, and he slips inside with a wave when I see him.
- He doesn't know Christ, he doesn't go to church and to top it all off he's a Beaver fan. **We gotta get him saved!**
- A few houses down is an older single man who's retired.
- When we first moved to the neighborhood there was a lot of turmoil at his home and the cops made several visits.
- He walks the dogs, smokes on the front porch, and he also doesn't know Christ and is not saved.
- I've taken the time to talk to them, get their names, and try to know them, listen them talk about their lives. And I have to confess that I have to really work at it.
- Even though my job is public speaking, I'm kind of private.
- I love people but I get my fill at work each day. When I go home I want to go inside the house and relax.
- But I've come to realize that my neighborhood, and my neighbors, are my mission field. And that's true for all of us.
- Maybe you're part of the 50% that knows your neighbors, or maybe you're the 50% who doesn't. Care about your neighbors!

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MY NEIGHBORS?

God loves my neighbors. (Jn 3:16)

John 3:16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

- The message of Jesus in a nutshell is that God sent his son to die for our sins, so we wouldn't perish but have eternal life.
- The message of Jesus is God loves us & has made a way for us.
- He's made it possible for anyone on earth to have eternal life through Jesus our Lord and Savior.
- It's pretty easy for us to talk about God loving the world.
- But "**the world**" is very abstract and vague. What in the world is the Bible talking about when it mentions the world?
- When the Bible says **world** it's talking about actual people.
- People with names and faces and stories.
- Real people with families, jobs, and worries and heartaches.
- When we think about God loving the world and wanting to save people in the world...all 6 billion people...it's hard to comprehend!
- And frankly many Christians don't bother trying to comprehend it. They are glad that God loves them!
- "God loves me, I'm saved, I'm good!"
- If he wants to love my neighbors that's great! Good for him!
- Not only does God love our neighbors...

God wants us to love our neighbors. (Mt 22:37-39)

-But God loving our neighbors and **US** loving our neighbors seems like a very different thing! **God doesn't live next to our neighbors!**

-He doesn't know what they're like! But Jesus said:

Matthew 22:37-39 "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

-The things that God gives to us, are meant to flow through us.

-What he gives us, we're supposed to pass on to others.

-God first loved us, and sent his Son for us.

-Our **first** response to his love for us, should be to love him back!

-But Jesus said the **second** response is equally as important; we are supposed to love our neighbor as ourselves.

-Jesus taught that we cannot separate our love for God from our love for others. Because they aren't separate things.

-You cannot compartmentalize these two things and treat them as unrelated. They go hand in hand.

-The two most important commandments for followers of Jesus to obey...**according to Jesus** love God and love our neighbors.

-Let's slow that down and roll it around a little bit. We are supposed to love our neighbors just like we love ourselves.

-On a good day, I could find lots of things to love about myself, and several things not to love about my neighbors.

-I don't know about you, but I find it much easier to love my family than to love my neighbor's family.

(Except of course my perfect neighbors who are sitting here this morning. We have no complaints about Bill and Kim! None that I can share on Sunday morning with them in the room!)

-Jesus calls us to love our neighbors like we love ourselves.

-But a neighbor once stole my bike. The neighbor's kid once broke my garbage can lid when he used it as a shield in a snowball fight.

-The neighbor's cat, the neighbor's dogs, the neighbor's blaring music. The neighbor's teenage kid speeding down our street!

-The neighbor's dead lawn; oh wait that's mine!!!

-But Jesus calls us to love our neighbor's as ourselves.

-Essentially that means loving them like we would like to be loved.

-Well I would like my neighbors to be the kind of people who would bring me a pumpkin pie for no particular reason. (they have)

-I would like my neighbors to bring my dog home if it ran off.

-I'd like neighbors who would invite me over for a BBQ or to watch the game.

-I'd like neighbors who would bring over meals if our family was sick, or would cut the grass if I had a busted leg.

-I'd like neighbors that would be there for me if I was in a crunch.

-That's how I would like to be loved by my neighbors.

- And here's what Jesus would say to that: if that's how you would like to be treated by your neighbors, then that's how you should treat them: Love your neighbor, like you love yourself.
- And if my neighbors knew how my sins could be forgiven.
- If my neighbors were holding the keys to the Kingdom of God.
- If my neighbors knew how I could live forever in Heaven with God...I'd hope that I had the kind of neighbors who would tell me.

God's plan for saving our neighbors involves us! (Mt 28:19-20)

Matthew 28:19-20 "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- We talk a lot about the Great Commission at Adventure.
- We break it down by talking about the four components:
- We **REACH** people in all nations.
- We **CONNECT** them to Jesus and his church at baptism.
- We **EQUIP** them by teaching them to obey all his commands
- We expect those new disciples to pass it on; to **DISCIPLE** others.
- God has commissioned the church with the task of reaching the whole world with the message of his Son Jesus Christ.
- When we're talking about all the people in the whole wide world, who do we begin with? Who do we reach out to first?
- Well how about our neighbors? You know:
- Those people who live next to us.
- Those people whose kids go to school with our kids.
- Those people we see when we're mowing the grass and raking the leaves and washing the car.
- Reaching the people in our world starts by reaching the people next door. We want everyone in our church to go on at least one mission trip in your life; all of us have a mission w/our neighbors
- I've gone on missions trips to Africa, Central America, Mexico and Native American reservations.
- And I've seen this weird thing happen over and over.
- People who go on these trips say that it is so much easier to share their faith on a mission's trip than at home.
- Can I just say, "That is absolutely true, but it is also **messed up**."
- We can travel across the world to share the message of Jesus with total strangers, who don't even speak our language.
- But we won't travel to the house next to us, to meet the strangers next door.
- We aren't here to heap guilt and shame on everyone this morning about what we **haven't done** to reach our neighbors.
- We've all missed some opportunities.
- And I don't think most Christians aren't sharing Jesus with neighbors because they don't care.

-Most people aren't sharing Jesus with their neighbors because they don't know how. As the old saying goes:

-They are planning to fail, because they failed to plan.

-So what I want to do this morning is give you a plan.

-And we are going to keep it really simple, and give this to you piece by piece over the next few weeks.

-Last year Pastor Jae did a message using the **"BLESS ACRONYM"**

-I felt like that was a really good tool last year when he shared it, but I didn't know what to do with it yet.

-I liked it, but I wasn't ready to know what to do with it.

- **BEGIN WITH PRAYER.** Pray for your neighbors
- **LISTEN.** Listen when they talk to you. Listen when they talk about their loves, their fears, their family, jobs, and finances.
- **EAT.** Most of us eat food every day. Unless you're fasting you're probably going to eat a meal. Guess what? So are your neighbors.
-If they eat, and I eat maybe we could eat together? Mind blown!
- **SERVE.** Is there a way we can help them? Serve them?
-If you walk up to a neighbor and said, "You want to hear about Jesus?" They'll probably say "no".
-But if you mowed their lawn, took their trash to the curb, helped them fix their car, loaned them a cup of sugar...you're showing them Jesus without actually telling about Jesus.
-And all those kinds of things are done with the hope that at some point you'll be able to...
- **SHARE THE MESSAGE OF JESUS WITH THEM.**
-That's a very basic breakdown of the B.L.E.S.S. acronym.

-It's funny how God works. Pastor Jae and I went to a conference in San Antonio in April and we had that Sunday morning free.

-So we went to Max Lucado's church and guess what they put in our hands? A little card that we'll give you on kick-off Sunday.

-And on that card was the B.L.E.S.S. acronym.

-I'm no prophet, but it seemed like God was trying to get that in my head so we could get it into our church.

-In our remaining time this morning I want to talk about your homework this week:

-Knowing that God love our neighbors.

-Knowing that God wants us to love our neighbors.

-Knowing that God wants to use us to help save our neighbors.

-Where should we start? This week we're going to start with prayer. Praying for our neighbors.

-Tuesday night my wife Laura and I went jogging around the neighborhood for a couple miles and then we did a walking lap.

-It was later, about 9:30 and as we walked I said let's pray.

-And something kind of cool happened.

-I had no script, and really didn't have a plan. I just asked "who do we know in our neighborhood?"

-And to my surprise, between the two of us, we knew a lot of people! There was a family over here with kids in our kid's school.

-I just offered a quick sentence prayer for them and their kids.

-We knew a family that had visited our church; prayed for them

-Just short, couple of sentence prayers.

-Knew some people who don't speak English; we prayed for them.

-Knew some people that we don't especially enjoy that much; we prayed for them anyways.

-We even prayed for some neighbors I didn't know and for chances to meet them and invite them to church.

-And in that process you know what? We prayed for a lot of people who don't know Jesus. Dozens.

-There was no awkward conversation. No Bible verses.

-No rejection. No disagreement. In fact, no one even noticed that we had prayed for them.

-But that's ok. The prayer works whether they heard it or not; the person who needed to hear it was our Father, and he heard us as we prayed for the lost people in our neighborhood.

-It might surprise you to know that Jesus did that same kind of thing. In Matthew 9 it talks about Jesus traveling from village to village, town to town. In his day most of the towns were very small, and separated by some distance.

-They were the ancient equivalent of our neighborhoods.

Matthew 9:36-38 "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields."

-He instructed his followers to pray for a harvest of souls in the town, in the villages, in the neighborhoods.

-In Roman's 10:1 Paul said his, "prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved." He was a Jew and the Israelites were his people (his neighbors) so he prayed for them.

-We can do that! This is something that we are instructed to do, that has eternal implications for people we know, and we can do this! I can do this, you can do this, and your kids could do this.

-Some of you have been wanting to get more exercise. Why not walk around your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors?

-You don't have to close your eyes or bow your heads, just pray silently as you walk around.

-Some of you are thinking you don't get around so good. Ok, drive around your neighborhood and pray for people.

-What if someone asks you what you're doing? Tell them.

-And don't overthink it. We're just lifting up little prayers on behalf of your neighbors as you go! It's so easy.

-But I'm warning you. If you start praying for neighbors, and I mean really praying for your lost neighbors, stuff will happen.

-You'll get opportunities to interact with your neighbors. You'll get opportunities to invite them over, hang out.

-Yes, you may have to actually talk to your neighbors!

-We'll have support counselors to talk to traumatized people after church in the lobby! It's going to be ok.

-We can do this! This is something that we are instructed to do, it has eternal implications for people we know.

-The truth is when you start praying for your neighbors, it'll change your attitude toward some of them.

-When we pray for other people it changes us.

-It will open your eyes to some of the needs of people in your own backyard. We become aware of their challenges and struggles.

-You'll gain a awareness of the spiritual battles that is being waged in their hearts and lives.

-You are being challenged to pray for you neighbors, and I want to know how it goes? We obviously have to be discreet with names and stuff, but send me an email this week and share your experiences. Give me a call or shoot me a text.

-And next Sunday when you come back, I'm going to ask how it went. This is too important for us to opt out of.

-As our life2life groups are gearing up, this would be great for your group to try one night. Go out and pray over the neighborhood of your host home.

-As our church heads into our busiest season (Sept-May) this is exactly what we need to be doing!

-Asking the Lord, who is in charge of the harvest, to raise up workers for the fields.

-I have prayed for God to raise up workers for the harvest fields in Yamhill County and the **good news** is he's answered.

-The bad news is that the workers are all of you. But it's not bad news. God wants to use you as a missionary in your own

neighborhood; to get people into heaven with the Good News about Jesus and what he's done for us.

Week 1 Neighbor Challenge: Pray for your neighbors!