

ADVENTURES IN NEIGHBORING

- On the **second day** of first grade there is a boy looking kind of dejected so the teacher asks him, “what’s wrong?”
- He says, “my dad was being mean to me this morning.”
- The teachers asks, “Well, how was he mean?”
- And the little boy says, “He’s always bossing me around.”
- The teacher asks, “Well, what did he tell you to do?”
- The little boy said, “I told him that I thought today would be a good day to take a break from school and he said I had to come!”
- One full day was enough to need a break!
- Well there are no “breaks” for Christians when it comes to the Great Commission.
- Jesus told his disciples: **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 could probably get most Christians to agree that the Great Commission is the mission for all churches.
- Most Christians would understand that the Great Commission is the mission for them.
- But the mission of reaching all the nations for Jesus is often lost in the busyness of our day to day lives.
- We can’t always be going overseas to disciple the nations.
- We might be in a life2life group discipling others, or learning how, but that’s a couple hours a week.
- We have jobs, kids, and homes, and hobbies, and we’re busy.
- And so for many of us (myself included) the Great Commission sometimes gets set on the back burner.
- Traveling around as some kind of missionary seems like an impossible task for most Christians; unless we see **OUR NEIGHBORHOODS ARE OUR FIRST MISSION FIELD**
- And that’s we’ve been talking about.
- How to B.L.E.S.S. our neighbors in the name of Jesus.
- Begin with Prayer.** How many have prayed for your neighbors?
- Listen.** How many have struck up a conversation with a neighbor?
- Eat.** This is harder. How many have shared a meal with a neighbor or **Served** a neighbor?
- Great job. Some of you are really working hard on this.
- Some are just getting started. But that’s the beauty of seeing our neighborhood as our mission field.

-Missions isn't a trip, it's not a program, it's the missionary life we live as neighbors to people who don't know Jesus.
-But the point of this whole bless strategy is to live a Christian life among our non-Christian neighbors.
-To love them how they are and for who they are.
-To listen to them. To share a bit of life with them.
-But also to watch for opportunities to **Share our story** with them.
-And if there is an area where most Christians struggle it's this.
-We don't know what to do! We don't know what to say!
-We don't know the verses! We lost our Bible highlighter!
-But our story is the same story that Jesus shared:

- **God loves sinners!**
- **He sent his sinless son Jesus to save us!**
- **Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins!**
- **Jesus rose from the grave!**
- **There is forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus!**

-That's not so tough. But even knowing the story isn't really what we struggle with.
-It's how to go about sharing it that usually trips us up.
-Look on the screen. Do you know what this is? **Carrot**
-When I was a kid carrots came like this.
-They were long they had skin on them that you peeled off.
-They had that nasty looking nub on the top that you chopped off.
-And that crooked little root on the other end U also chopped off.
-Many people today never buy carrots that look like this, and some people have never seen carrots that look like this!
-The carrot eating world was changed forever in the 1980's when a carrot farmer came up with a plan.
-The man who revolutionized the carrot eating world was named Mike Yurosek of Newhall, California.
-He owned a carrot processing plant and he was throwing away carrots! As much as 70% of the carrot crops that he bought because the carrots were all gnarled, crooked and misshapen.
-And apparently people don't like ugly looking carrots.
-One day he took those ugly carrots and started experimenting with them. He put them in a potato peeler and out came the **baby carrot**. Now you might think big deal, so what?
-But in the 1980s the US spent 100million dollars a year on carrots
-Today the US spends a 500 million dollars a year on carrots!
-People still love carrots, and they eat more carrots than ever before, but the way they consume carrots has changed.
-That's a great picture of how things are with the church in the US

- Just like people have changed the way they eat carrots, people have changed the way that they're involved with church.
- People aren't done with the church, but we have to realize that the way they consume church has changed.
- The way people interact with church has changed.
- What people are looking for in the church has changed.
- But what they need is still the same. And the remedy for what ails them is the same.
- And our message is the same; it's the simple message of Jesus! **Hebrews 13:8** says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."
- We never change our message, because Jesus never changes.
- But at times we do have to be flexible in our methods.
- The church in America is at a crossroads where we must adapt HOW WE SHARE our story or risk fading into irrelevance.
- Churches that refuse to adapt to our ever-changing world are simply dying.
- In our home there is a picture of Laura and her sisters when they were little. Can I just tell you that she was a beauty even then?
- That picture is over 30 years old. **Or maybe I should say 20????**
- And since it was taken I've seen it in a couple of different frames.
- He parents have copies of that picture, her sisters have copies of that picture, and the frames or scrapbooks are all different.
- No one minds if the frame changes, but you don't mess with the picture. You wouldn't edit the face of those three little girls.
- You can change the frame but the picture you leave the same.
- That's how we should see the story of Jesus.
- As times change, and societies change we can reframe the message, but we don't change the message.
- Let me give you a few examples:
- In Acts 2 when the apostle Peter shared the gospel he was speaking to Jews from all over the world about the Messiah.
- So he used Jewish scripture to explain Jesus to the Jews.
- When Paul wandered into Athens in Acts 17, he encountered a bunch of Greek philosophers, so he presented the message of Christ a bit more philosophically to the Greeks.
- When we go with E3 Partners to Rwanda we use a very simple approach with pictures, and story-telling, because many in that country have a strong oral tradition and some are illiterate.
- But we're presenting the message of Christ.
- As five of us are training for India, we're learning to share the message of Jesus by starting with the creation account.

-Because Hindus believe in so many gods we're trying to establish that our message is the message of the Most High Creator God.

-But it's still the message of Jesus.

-We reframe the gospel, depending on our audience.

-We contextualize it for the people we are trying to reach.

-As we think about our unsaved neighbors, we have to frame the gospel in a way that is relevant to them.

Colossians 4:5 "Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity."

-For years the church has focused on getting people information.

-We aimed to get them Bible knowledge through messages, bibles, study material.

-That approach was especially relevant to people who lacked information. But now we live in the information age!

-People don't need us to get information; they have 24 hour a day access to unlimited information online. In their hands!

-For years we've focused on getting people into the church building for Bible teaching, worship and fellowship.

-That is still key, and it still works, but once again, people have access to Bible teaching, worship music online.

-For 100s of year in Christianity, people needed the church for these things they didn't have access to.

-But now they have access to everything, and some are thinking "why do I need the church?"

-That's a great question for us to be asking. "What do they need us for? What do we offer that they really need?"

-They don't need us to give the information.

-They don't need us for Bible facts.

-They don't need us for praise music. But you know what people are just hungry for? **Meaningful relationships!**

-People are more connected to the global community than ever before in human history!

-But studies increasingly show that people are also more lonely than they have ever been.

-People have 100s and 1000s of "online friends" but very few have friends of any substance.

-They have TV pastors, and youtube videos, and self-help books, and bloggers and tweeters and when they need advice they can watch Dr. Phil!

-But they have no one to talk to when life gets crazy.

-They have no one they can turn to for wisdom, counsel, comfort, and prayer. That's where the modern church can **really shine!**

-We have the chance to be that Christian neighbor who is sharing our story, as we share our lives with them.

-Col 4:5 says, "Make the most of every opportunity!" But how do we do that?

-Remember that movie Karate Kid? The original one?

-Mr. Miyagi has got Danielson waxing the car. Wax on, wax off.

-He's got him painting the fence and scrubbing the floor.

-And when Danielson finally get fed up, Mr. Miyagi reveals the big surprise to him. He wasn't really learning how to wax the car or paint fences or scrub the porch; he was learning Karate moves!

-I feel like Mr. Miyagi this morning!

-These last three weeks we've been teaching you Karate moves!

-No, we've been teaching you evangelism.

-We've been teaching you easy ways to do the Great Commission.

-We've been teaching you how to make the most of every opportunity.

-See, when you're talking to your neighbor and they mention anything at all that might even remotely sound like a prayer request, that's your cue to say, **"I'm going to pray for you about that."**

-They may ask you more, they may not, but that was you sharing a piece of your story: That you are a person of faith and prayer.

-When you take time to talk to your neighbor and you listen to what they are saying.

-When you listen to them talk about their family, their job, their struggles, their interests you're sharing a bit of your story: that you are a person who cares about other people.

-When you invite them into your home to **Eat** a meal, you're sharing a bit of your story: that you are a generous and hospitable person who shares with others what God has shared with you.

-When you **serve** them, you are sharing a bit of your story, that you believe in helping other people.

-And all those things are part of sharing your faith. But there is an important piece that we must not leave out.

Romans 10:14 "But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?"

-While praying and listening and eating meals together and serving are all great...none of those things save people.

-Jesus saves people! But our neighbors cannot call on Jesus for salvation unless someone tells them about Jesus!!!

- How can they believe if they have never heard?
- That's where many Christians start getting sweaty palms, start looking for an excuse or a way out.
- But you know why that seems so daunting!
- Because we've somehow bought into the notion that we give them the whole thing all at once in one formal presentation.
- That's the beauty of this B.L.E.S.S. strategy. We're not on some mission trip with 7 days to convert people before we go home.
- These are our neighbors. The people we see every day, every week, year after year.

1 Peter 3:15 "And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, *always be ready to explain it.*"

- And when we pray for them, and listen to them, and eat meals together, and serve them, we have opportunities to share bits and pieces over time.
- When they talk about their beliefs, that's our cue to share some of our beliefs. ***Always be ready!***
- When they bring up failures, you can share about your failures and about the forgiveness we have in Jesus. ***Always be ready!***
- When they share about their marriage, their kids, their finances; that's your opportunity to share your thoughts on those things. ***Always be ready!***
- And if you've befriended your neighbor and you share your faith with them over time, there will be an opportunity to invite them to church.
- There may be a moment when they're ready to hear how to accept Christ.
- Most people accept Jesus because someone has shared Jesus with them over time. It's not usually a one time deal.
- Most people accept Jesus by being around Christian people over time. And that's why our neighborhood are a great place to start.
- Most people accept Jesus because someone cared enough to take the time to invest in them. ***That's our job.***
- My 5 Neighborhood card. Names of 5 closest neighbors. Put it somewhere you'll see it and remember to pray for them.**
- And on that card is the BLESS strategy.**
- Refuse to be the neighbor that just waves and then pulls into the garage. Begin with prayer. Be committed to praying for them!
- We stop and talk and listen to what they're saying.
- Be those people next door that are inviting them over to **EAT** a meal with us in our home.

-Be those helpful people that would be happy to **SERVE** our neighbor anyway we can.

-And ultimately what we are looking for is a chance to **SHARE OUR STORY** with them.

-But first things first. You can't lead them in the way of Jesus until you've first accepted Jesus as Lord of your life:

-And here's the message for everyone today.

-You're a sinner. You've sinned against God and other people.

-You've sinned with your body, your mouth, and your mind.

But our God loves sinners! God has never stopped loving you and nothing you can do could ever make him stop. He loves you.

-God sent his sinless son Jesus to save us!

-Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins!

-Imagine that! Jesus Christ died for the sins he knew you would commit, before you were even born!

-And if he would have stayed dead, it wouldn't have meant much for us. But ***Jesus rose from the grave!***

There is forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus!

-All our mistakes, all our transgressions, our regrets, our failure, our compromises

-If you believe that simple message, it's time to make a commitment. In the Bible, when people believed in Jesus they did something. They took action.

-They confessed their belief in Jesus to other Christians, they committed to start the lifelong process of repentance, and they were baptized.

-The water isn't magic, it's not even holy. It's just water.

-But the act of baptism is holy. It's a sacred moment when you pledge your life to Christ. It's symbolic of what Jesus has done for us: he washed us clean of all our sins.

-And do you know when people got baptized according to Jesus and the apostles. The moment they first believed.

Acts 22:16 says, ***"What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord."***

-We have at least one baptism today. But we have towels and clothes and we are ready for more.

-If you're ready to make that decision we're ready to baptize you!