

Who Is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:25-37

Resources for worship & reflection:

Hymn: "Who Is My Neighbor?" (to the tune of "Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty")

"Who is my neighbor?" A lawyer asked Jesus, to test him.
So Jesus told him a story to answer his question:
Lonely the way,
Lonely the traveler one day,
Robbers attacked him and left him.

First down the road came a priest who just chose to ignore him.
Next came a Levite who wouldn't do anything for him.
Then one despised,
Hated in everyone's eyes,
Knelt down to heal and restore him.

Tending the wounds of the man, the Samaritan labored.
He was the one with compassion, the one in God's favor.
Not by a creed
But by responding to need,
He proved to be the good neighbor.

Text: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette Tune: Lobe Den Herren

Consider listening here: go.grace.lc/week1song (ctrl + click to open in a new tab)

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, You call me to love You with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love my neighbor as myself. Help me to know and love You better this week, and to also understand who You consider my neighbors to be. Use me to show Your love and remind me to pray for my neighbors as I interact with and remember them. It is in the name of Jesus Christ I pray, Amen.

Personal study for Week 1:

Read Luke 10:25-37

1. Spend a few minutes considering how Jesus answered this question of who someone's neighbor is. Does this conflict at all with your idea of who your neighbor is? How?
2. What people in your life have you had the deepest connections with? How did they move from an acquaintance to a deep relationship? What role did vulnerability play in this connection?

3. Who is Jesus re-defining as our neighbor in this parable? Who are your neighbors today, based on that definition?

4. What does it mean to love God, and also Love our neighbors, as ourselves, with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind?

5. The dying man very obviously needed help, but many struggles people encounter today may not be as straightforward to recognize or understand. How can we actively listen to our neighbors more to see their struggles and offer them help?

6. Consider a situation where you experienced great mercy, or when you forgave someone/showed mercy in a difficult situation. What happened, and what did you learn from it?

Your first challenge - identify your neighbor: List out some people you encounter regularly, who are your neighbors, based on Jesus' definition. Pray for them and ask God to show you the love He has for them. Find an opportunity to intentionally converse with one of them to check in and see how they're doing. Find out if there's anything you may be able to help them with.

What's Wrong with My Neighbor?

Ephesians 2:14-22, 1 John 1:5-10

Resources for worship & reflection:

Hymn: "O God, You Give Us Neighbors" (to the tune of "The Church's One Foundation" LSB 644)

O God, you give us neighbors for whom your love abounds.
They've come here seeking refuge; they work here in our towns.
Their children go to school here; they come to church and pray.
O Lord, we grieve when neighbors are being sent away.

O God, you give us neighbors in this world that divides.
We see them at the border; they're struggling for their lives.
They're hurting by the roadside, and by the river, too.
You call us to show mercy to neighbors loved by you.

O God, you give us neighbors and call us all to see
our common fears and longings, our shared humanity.
You call us all to listen to burdens they have known,
to hear the truth they tell us, to see the love they've shown.

O God, you give us neighbors; and now, what must we do?
This question asked of Jesus is one we ask anew.
May we not make excuses and choose to walk on by
these neighbors fleeing violence— some sent back now to die.

God, may we work for justice for those who live in fear;
may we show Christ's compassion, and pray and persevere—
and by your Holy Spirit, in all we do and say,
may we stand up for neighbors now being sent away.

Text: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette Tune: Samuel Sebastian Wesley
Consider listening here: go.grace.lc/week2song (ctrl + click to open in a new tab)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to see my neighbors through your eyes. Help me to recognize their humanity, and the love and mercy you have for them. Tear down the dividing walls of hostility that separate us and teach me to preach peace to both those who are far away and those who are near. Help me to recognize my sin and continue seeking you for forgiveness and guidance. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Personal study for Week 2:

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

1. How would you describe the "dividing wall of hostility" in this passage?

2. What differences between people in our culture today create their own 'dividing walls of hostility'? Which ones do you find yourself encountering most often, and which ones seem the strongest to you?

3. How do you think these divisions are created, at a base level? How can we destroy these barriers?

Read 1 John 1:5-10

4. Focus on verse 8. The Arbinger Institute describes this as "Self-Deception: the problem of not knowing we have a problem, and being resistant to the idea of having a problem." How do you think that this self-deception impacts how we view ourselves, and others? How does it impact our view of Jesus?

5. What needs to change for us to view ourselves, others, and Jesus more accurately?

6. When our mindset changes, how might that effect our relationships with others, and with God? How might you approach them differently?

Connect with your neighbor: Think of the neighbors you identified in week 1. Are there any 'dividing walls of hostility' – differences in lifestyle, thought, or belief – that separate you? Remember that forgiveness and life is offered to all by the death of Jesus, and God is the one lawgiver and judge (James 4:12). This week, pray again for these neighbors and ask that God would help you see past the dividing walls to the fellow human that Jesus died for. Follow up with these people as well – or reach out if you haven't already! If any mentioned things that you would be able to help them with, act on that, or create a plan to do so when you're able.

Prayer: Lord, continue to teach me how to love You and my neighbors more fully – as You have purposed me to do. Guide me to and through fruitful conversations. Thank you that because of Jesus, I can forgive my neighbors as you have forgiven me. Help me to do so, for the sake of Jesus who died for us all. Amen.

Expanding the Neighborhood

Matthew 28:16-20

Resources for worship & reflection:

Hymn: "I Love to Tell the Story"

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.
I love to tell the story, because I know it's true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.

Refrain

I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory,
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story, 'tis pleasant to repeat,
What seems each time I tell it more wonderfully
sweet;
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard
The message of salvation from God's own holy
Word.

Refrain

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the
rest;
And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new
song,
'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.

Refrain

Text: Kate Hankley Tune: William G. Fischer
Consider listening here: go.grace.lc/week3song (ctrl +
click to open in a new tab)

Prayer: Lord, You call me to 'go and make disciples of all nations.' Show me what this looks like with my day-to-day 'neighbors', and be with me as I walk out in faith to share my witness of Your goodness with others. Help me see others through Your eyes, and teach me how to make connections with them that will bear eternal fruit. I pray this for the glory of Your holy name, Jesus. Amen.

Personal study for Week 3:

Read Matthew 28:16-20

1. What is a disciple? Do believers automatically become disciples? According to this passage, how do we make disciples?
2. The action verb that starts Jesus' command of his disciples was to "Go." How does this impact your understanding of the role of a disciple of Christ? How would you describe the difference between a 'come' vs 'go' approach to discipleship?

3. **Going into our neighborhoods does not necessarily mean evangelizing door-to-door. It means being more intentional in connecting with our neighbors and showing them that we care about them.** Think of some of the most effective disciples of Jesus Christ that you have known in your life. How do you think they made connections with others? What are some of the most effective communication tools we have to connect with people?
4. What prevents us from going to other people with the Gospel?
5. We are to help others grow in their relationship with Jesus. What are some ways we can help others spiritually grow so they can become strong and stable believers?
6. **The disciples were sent out – as we are – on the greatest task in the world, but with them there was the greatest presence in the world (observe the end of v. 20).** What frightens you most about being sent into your world as a disciple of Jesus Christ? How do you think you can lean on the presence of God more to empower you in the call to love your neighbors?

Expand the Neighborhood: How bold have you been in the past 2 weeks to connect with your neighbors, as defined in week 1? Are there any others you feel called to reach out to and have an intentional conversation? Continue to form and invest in connecting with them, and pray that God would move your conversations towards faith when the time is right. Some extra points of prayer and action:

- Find out how many people were baptized at your congregation this year. Pray that God would increase that number in the year to come.
- Pray and be intentional about inviting someone to church. In the next year, if all of us invited just one person each to attend a worship service, think of the results.
- Pray that you can fulfill the Great Commission within your sphere of influence.

The First Step in Neighboring: "Brokenness"

Psalm 34

Resources for worship & reflection:

Song: "Take My Life (Holiness)" – Micah Stampley

Holiness, holiness is what I long for
Holiness is what I need
Holiness, holiness is what You want for me
Repeat x1

Righteousness, righteousness is what I long for
Righteousness is what I need
Righteousness, righteousness is what You want for me

Chorus:

So, Take my heart and mold it
Take my mind, transform it
Take my will, conform it
To Yours, to Yours, Oh Lord

Brokenness, **brokenness is what I long for**
brokenness is what I need
brokenness, brokenness is what You want for me

Chorus x3

Holiness, holiness is what long for
Holiness is what I know I need
Holiness, holiness is what
You want for me

Songwriter: Scott Underwood

Consider listening here: <https://go.grace.lc/week4song>
(ctrl + click to open in a new tab)

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, You call me to admit and even embrace my brokenness because it leads me straight back to Your work on the cross. Thank You for being broken for me. Thank You for helping me remember that all the saints of old were flawed as I am. Strip away from me arrogance and pride. Replace these with Your holiness and righteousness. Keep transforming me until the day I meet You face to face. I ask this in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Personal study for Week 4:

Psalm 34 was written by David during a very dark time in his life, which we can read about in 1 Samuel 21. He is on the run from Saul who has sworn to kill him. He runs to Gath, a Philistine stronghold – enemy territory (recall that David had already slain Goliath- the Philistine strong man in 1 Samuel 17) to seek shelter there.

Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15

1. David is afraid so he tries to disguise himself as a madman. Do you ever disguise yourself/act differently than you usually would around people you don't trust? What masks do you wear around different groups of people?
2. How do you honestly face fear? Are you generally inclined to share your fears and anxieties... or to hide them?

3. How does knowing that you are safe and protected in God's hands impact your day-to-day fears and anxieties? What role could a safe person or safe environment play in your life during difficult times?

Read Psalm 34 – the whole thing...

4. Look back at verses 17-18. What do you see as the connection between righteousness and brokenness?
5. What brokenness have you recently experienced/are you going through now? How can David's Psalm encourage you?
6. What is your reaction to the statement "true righteousness begins at brokenness"?
7. How might honest brokenness be the starting point for real neighboring?

Be broken with your neighbors: As you think about the people God has placed around you (neighbors), who might be needing a safe person to entrust their brokenness with? What story of your own brokenness might serve to open the door to real and honest conversation? Pray for the Lord to open a door this week and then be willing to walk through it... sharing your brokenness so others might be willing to share theirs and thus receive healing!

Prayer: Lord, I come to You honestly afraid of many things. Like David I often try and disguise my fears, but that only makes things more absurd. Help me to be honest with myself, You, and a few trusted neighbors. I desire Your healing and to share that healing with those who are also in need. May this be so for the sake of Him who died that we might live. Amen.

A Healthy Neighborhood

Ephesians 4:1-6 Unity in the Body of Christ

Resources for worship & reflection:

Song: Love God Love People (feat. Michael W. Smith) Danny Gokey

I've been running in circles
Jumping the hurdles
Getting caught in that rush of doing so much
I'm feeling kinda worn out
All this checking the boxes
Trying to be flawless
Has me spinning my head, catching my breath
Too afraid to slow down
I tell myself to keep this up
That God wants more than just my love
But I've been complicating things
It's just like me to overthink

Chorus:

Gotta keep it real simple, keep it real simple
Bring everything right back to ground zero
'Cause it all comes down to this
Love God and love people
We're living in a world that keeps breakin'
But if we want to find a way to change it
It all comes down to this
Love God and love people

Oh, this is freedom
The keys to the Kingdom
Knowing life will be found when **love can be loud**
'Cause love is what it's all about

I tell myself to keep this up
That all God wants is just my love
No more complicating things
No more need to overthink

Chorus

Love is patient, love is kind
Rescues hearts and changes lives
Love is all we need to make things right

Gotta keep it real simple, oh
It's really so simple, ooh

Chorus

Keep on loving, keep on loving
Love God and love people
So keep on loving, keep on loving
It's all about love
It's how we change the world
Love God and love people

Songwriters: Ben Glover, Danny Gokey, Jeff Sojka, Colby Wedgeworth, Riley Clemmons.
Consider listening here: go.grace.lc/week5song (ctrl + click to open in a new tab)

Prayer: Gracious Lord, You present me with people to love on a daily basis. Some are near and others are far away. Somehow, they are overlooked. My minutes easily become filled with selfish ambitions and I fail to see opportunities to love my neighbors in Your name. At times, I pity others and believe them to be nothing more than unfortunate souls, or I place judgement upon Your people and determine the possibility of knowing or aiding them to be impossible. I fail to see the beautiful creations You made them to be. Forgive me when I place more importance upon myself and my goings and comings. Remind me that there is freedom in loving others in Your name. Your requirements of Your people, Lord, are simple. Love You and love others. Thank You for teaching me to love like Jesus. May the love, kindness, and compassion I show, in the name of Jesus, bring healing to my neighbors. It is then that I will find health, and it is then that my neighborhood will thrive. Thank You, Lord, for the gift my neighbors are to me. They teach me to go beyond myself and grow in compassion. Amen.

Personal Study for Week 4:

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

1. Paul demonstrated that God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, has made a way for both Jew and Gentile to unify as one body of believers called the Church. God's people show godly wisdom as they observe this passage. When have you experienced such unity with another person? Did the situation help you mature in your relationship with God and with each other?
2. How do you see different personalities and gifts come together to build God's Kingdom? What do you see as your role in helping your neighbor discover and live out their purpose?
3. Knowing you are called to love your neighbor, are you satisfied with how you are currently leaning into people? Who is walking alongside you? How can you grow in your relationships at church?
4. We begin to serve one another, faithfully using the gifts we have been given by Jesus that the body would mature and function as one with Christ as the Head. What do you think your spiritual gifts are? Read Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11-12 for reference on spiritual gifts.
5. Do you know your neighbors around where you live, work and play? The third stanza in the lyrics we read says, "Knowing life will be found when love can be loud; 'Cause love is what it's all about." What does it mean to you to 'love loud' amongst your neighbors? How do you love your neighbors on the other side of the world?
6. Are there situations in your life where God (or 'the hope of the Lord') has freed you from something? What did you learn/discover from that time, or from stories you've heard about finding freedom in Christ?

Unite with your Neighbors - Near: Consider the neighbors you have interacted with in the past few weeks. Who can you choose to unite with and 'love loud' on? Is it someone who needs to be forgiven or be asked for forgiveness? Is it someone who needs to feel listened to or encouraged? Someone who is lonely? What tangible way can you make time in your schedule to be Jesus to your neighbor?

Far: There are people all over the world who may feel alone and unsupported in the faith. Have you considered sponsoring a child, which benefits a family and exposes them to the love and truth of Jesus Christ?

Here are links to several reputable ministries where you can make a difference and be in relationship with others. There are many more opportunities! academy4.org, compassion.com, lovingliberia.com, worldvision.org

BONUS REFLECTION: Ephesians 4:1-6

Text: "4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

1. Read through the passage. What words stand out to you? What thoughts or emotions are being brought out?
2. Read through it again, placing yourself in the shoes of the speaker. What do you see or hear? What are you thinking and feeling?
3. Read through it a third time as the person receiving this Word. What do you see or hear? What are you thinking and feeling?

When we focus on the Unity of the Spirit in verse 3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," we recognize such unity could only come from Him.

Note the use of 'One' seven times in verses 4-6. Seven is considered a whole/complete and perfect number in Scripture.

The Ultimate Neighborhood

Revelation 21-22

Resources for worship & reflection:

Hymn: LSB 561 "The Tree of Life"

The tree of life with ever good in Eden's holy
orchard stood,
And of its fruit so pure and sweet God let the man
and woman eat.
Yet in this garden also grew Another tree of which
they knew;
Its lovely limbs with fruit adorned Against whose
eating God had warned.

The stillness of that sacred grove Was broken, as
the serpent strove
With tempting voice Eve to beguile and Adam too
by sin defile.
O day of sadness when the breath of fear and
darkness, doubt and death,
Its awful poison first displayed Within the world so
newly made.

What mercy God shower to our race,
a plan of rescue by his grace;
In sending One from woman's seed,
the One to fill our greatest need
For on a tree uplifted high
His only Son for sin would die;
Would drink the cup of scorn and dread
To crush the ancient serpent's head!

Now from that tree of Jesus' shame
Flows life ternal in His name;
For all who trust and will believe,
Salvations living fruit receive,
And of this fruit so pure and sweet
The Lord invites the world to eat,
To find within this cross of wood
The tree of life and every good.

Text: Stephen P. Starke Tune: Bruce W. Becker
Consider listening here: go.grace.lc/week6song

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, we thank You for the goodness of Your created world. We thank You for the life You have given to us – Your handiwork –we are creatures of Your design. We long to be in the place where things function as You designed them. Where we are no longer banished from the tree of life but are restored to life everlasting. Bring us to that place by the glorious power of our resurrected Lord Jesus! Amen.

Personal study for Week 6:

Read Genesis 2:9

1. How do you imagine life in the pre-sin Garden? Imagine the sounds, smells, tastes, colors... how are those experiences different from what our senses experience today?

Read Revelation 21-22 – These are the last chapter of the Bible – God's final word.

2. Reading Genesis 2:8-9 and comparing this to Revelation 22 (look for the Tree of Life!), we can observe the unity of Scripture in beginning and end, and how God had a big-picture purpose and vision through it all. When have you seen God's big picture come through (His purpose prevail) in situations where it seemed like He wasn't at work?

3. What has caused you the most mourning, heartache, crying and pain in the past year? What does it mean to you that this will all pass away in the new creation (21:4)?

4. Christ repeats the words "I am coming soon" in chapter 22 three times (22:7, 12, 20). How do these words sum up the theme of Revelation? How does this impact your outlook on life?

5. Does this beautiful vision of what is to come motivate your "neighboring"? How? Is there anyone in your sphere of influence who needs to hear about the great things God has in store for those who trust in Christ as Savior? How should we respond to our neighbors when they reveal to us their mourning, heartache, crying, and pain?

6. How does trusting in Christ as Savior help a person not just in eternity but now in our personal 'neighborhoods'?

7. How has this study overall changed how you view, approach, and interact with God, yourself, and your neighbors?

Final Challenge: Review and reflect on each of the challenges from weeks 1-5. Have you followed up with anyone? If not, it is not too late. Please prayerfully consider who God might want you to neighbor... both now and in your days on earth to come. Remember the Samaritan went out of his way – generously provided – graciously hosted – compassionately cared for another of God's creatures even though they had some differences – religiously, socially, morally... and Jesus commends us to do the same!

Prayer: Father, make us into people who reflect your love, compassion, and generosity. Continue showing us how to neighbor well and keep our eyes open for Your divine opportunities to do so. For the sake of him who died that we might live! Amen.