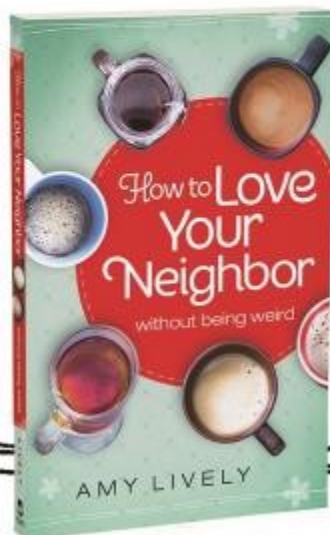


how to **Love**
Your
Neighbor
without being weird



Participant's Guide

by Amy Lively & Sara Edwards



Participant's Guide

Small Group Curriculum for

“How to Love Your Neighbor Without Being Weird”

By Amy Lively and Sara Edwards

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→→→→ Welcome ←←←←

To our neighbors near and far—

Welcome! Although we've never met you, we already know a few things about you. We know you love Jesus, or you wouldn't commit your time and energy to study His #2 command. We know you already love your neighbor, or you wouldn't read a book about ways to love them more.

And we know you do want to love your neighbor *more*. More sincerely, more effectively. You want to get rid of the guilt, and finally get this right. We know you don't want to be weird, you don't want to be offensive, you don't want to push people away as you try to draw them near.

We know you're already thinking, "I don't have time for this!" We know your calendar is full, your family needs you, and you're already serving at your church. You have a job, responsibilities, commitments.

And fears. You have plenty of fears. What if your neighbors don't like you? What if you don't like them? What if they reject you? What if they expect you to know the answers to all life's questions? What if they become needy and demanding?

Or maybe that's just us.

We've each struggled with our own fears in our own neighborhoods. But we're here to tell you: we learned how to love our neighbors, and lived to tell the tale! We knocked on their doors, opened our homes, sat around our kitchen tables sipping coffee. We made mistakes, but then we made friends. We discovered the sheer genius of God's command and discovered joy in what we once dreaded.

Sara and Amy have never actually met one another, either! [Sara](#) lives in the suburbs of Atlanta with her husband, two children and a puppy named Coco. [Amy](#) and her husband have a newly empty nest and a tiny house in the High Rockies of Colorado. Sara hangs out with Millennials, Amy's closer to Baby Boomers. Sara's an introvert, Amy's an extrovert. We live in different time zones and have different hobbies. Between the two of us, there's no fear you could have that we haven't battled, and there's no excuse you could make that we haven't already argued before the Lord.

God introduced us in the most interesting way, and He's united our hearts and hands in this mission to love our neighbors. We collaborated on this Small Group Guide and we both write for our blog and social media (please stop by and introduce yourself!). While we have very different personalities and perspectives, we are united in our desire to bring God glory in our neighborhoods.

**We're here for you, we're praying for you, and we already love you—
& your neighbors.**



Amy Lively



Sara Edwards

Participant's Guide: How it Works

This Participant's Guide walks you through each chapter of *How to Love Your Neighbor Without Being Weird* by Amy Lively (Bethany House, 2015). As you read the book with your small group, Bible study, book club, or in your personal devotions, you'll learn how to overcome your fears about sharing your faith.

And it won't be weird!

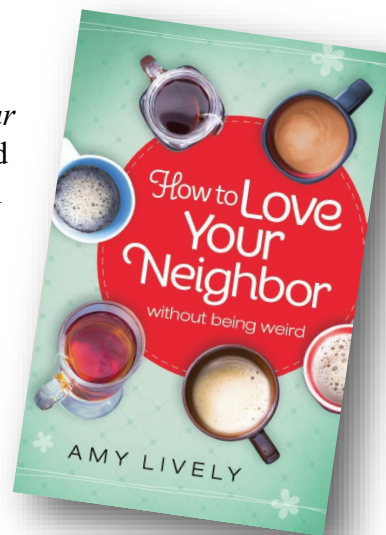
The "Next Best Steps" from the end of each chapter are included in your Guide, along with a weekly challenge that will take you out of the comfort of your living room and into the lives of your neighbors. There's also space to write your prayers and praises and keep a record of how God is working in your neighborhood.

As you make this leap, please feel free to adapt these tips, tools and techniques to your personality, your neighbors' needs, and the situation at hand. Some ideas will work beautifully in your neighborhood, others will not—and that's okay! Find what works for you, then send us your stories, ideas and suggestions to help and encourage someone else.



If you download the Guide to your computer, smartphone or tablet, the links will be active and you'll have instant access to neighborly advice! There are also brief videos from Amy and Sara each week. You can download the guide and find the videos by scanning this code with your phone, or visit www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com/guides.

Please connect with us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/howtoloveyourneighbor) and our blog (www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com) for more tips and tools to love your neighbor!



Small Group Notes

Leader: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

Directions/Parking: _____

Childcare? ☐ No ☐ Yes: RSVP by _____

Day & Time: _____

Dates: _____

icebreakers & expectations

Video Session

The problem with loving your neighbor...

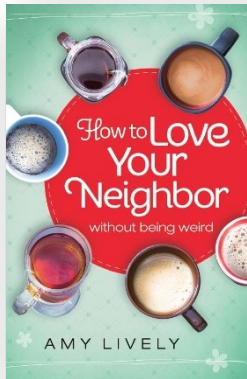
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____



Read Chapter 1
for next week,
when you'll discuss
the Next Best Steps
with your group and
do the first weekly
challenge: **PRAY**

My Small Group Members

Names & Notes

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



ICEBREAKER Please share your name,
where you grew up, where you live
now, and your favorite television
show when you were a child.

prayers & praises



WEEK 1

pray

CHAPTER 1 the view from my window

Next Best Steps

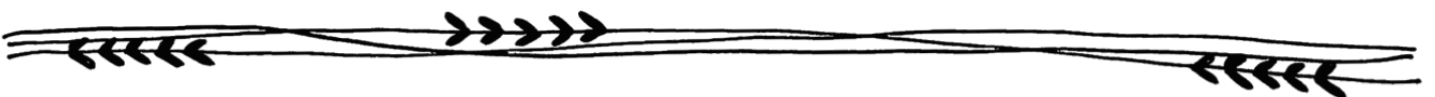
1. Have you ever pretended to be someone you're not? When we get tired of our charade, there are three options: blow your cover, bow out, or become who you're pretending to be. Which did you do?

2. Who are your gGg's? Plan a special time to get together so you can tell them how much they've meant to you, or send a handwritten card of appreciation. If you don't have a good, godly girlfriend, ask God to bring someone special into your life.

3. Have you ever experienced a setback just as you were stepping up into a new phase of your faith? How did you get through this trying time? Who helped you? Did your faith become stronger or was it undermined? When it happens again, how will you respond?

4. What is the view from your window? Describe the relationships you have in your neighborhood. Do you know your neighbors? Have you ever had a spiritual conversation with a neighbor?

5. Where is God asking you for "five minutes of total, uncompromising obedience"? Have you been arguing and debating with Him about anything He is nudging you to do? Recall a time you obeyed God first and asked questions later. How does obedience make things clear?



Why to pray for your neighbor

When God puts a desire in your heart to love your neighbor, your first reaction is to do something. You need to bring them a meal. You need to send them a note. You need to invite them to Bible Study. You need to save their souls! This often ignites fear of failure, fear of your neighbor's reaction, fear of messing this up somehow. Action seems urgent and necessary... but prayer seems like a last resort. Yet, it is prayer that serves as a powerful agent of change and a weapon against fear.

Praying for your neighbors passionately, and persistently will cause you to experience your faith in new and powerful ways. Look at what Jesus Himself said about the importance of prayer.

And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Luke 11:9-10

- Circle the phrases that are repeated in these verses.
- Underline the promises Jesus gives regarding prayer.
- Have you ever seen a life transformed by prayer? Did you yourself participate in praying for that person? How did that affect your faith?

Jesus compares prayer to knocking on a door. God wants to open the door and let you in on what He is up to in your neighborhood! He has a plan, He is already at work, but we have to decide if we want to be involved or not. Prayer won't change God's heart toward your neighbors (He's already crazy about them!), but it will change you.

Paul provides us with a prayer that will unlock doors in our neighborhoods—

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:2-6 NIV

- What does it look like to be watchful in your neighborhood? What are you thankful about in your neighborhood?
- What is the “mystery of Christ”? Read Ephesians 3:1-12 for more explanation.
- Underline Paul's “prayer requests”.

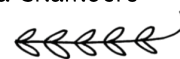
Let's translate these verses into a personal prayer for you and the neighbors who live around you—

“Lord, help me to be watchful to what is happening in the lives of my neighbors. Thank you for placing me here and entrusting these people to me to love. Please open a door for me, that I may tell my neighbors the Good News about Jesus. Help me to proclaim it clearly, as I should. Help me be wise in the way I act toward (Danielle, The Smiths, my co-worker); show me how to make the most of every opportunity. Let my conversation be gracious and attractive and give me the right response for anyone who does not yet believe in you. Amen.”



“Prayer does not equip us for the greater work; it is the greater work.”

Oswald Chambers



how to pray for your neighbor

There are no perfect prayers... but with that being said, there are countless ways you can pray for your neighbors! Adapt any of these tips for your personality, your schedule and the needs in your neighborhood.

Pray by name

- Register at www.pray4everyhome.com to instantly receive a free, detailed map of your neighborhood with the names and addresses of your 100 closest neighbors. Pick two of them, and pray for them by name. Update your map as you pray for each neighbor. This site is a treasure of detailed information about your neighborhood—and it's all free!
- Write the name of two neighbors you commit to pray for through the end of this study:
 1. _____
 2. _____

Pray with your pen

- Sometimes I write my prayers in a scribbly scrawl no one will ever decipher, but the act of writing helps me concentrate. Close your eyes at the keyboard and pour out a letter to the Lord. Give God time to talk while you listen, and remember that a serendipitous thought may be His soft whisper—so jot down any ideas that come during prayer.
- If you'd like to keep a record of God's faithfulness, write your prayers in a [Prayer Journal](#) or the back of an envelope—the important thing is to engage your mind with your hand, to create a visual reminder of who you're praying for, and remember to praise God when He responds.

Pray with your voice

Pray along with these songs and ask God to make them reality in your community. You can find them all on YouTube, Spotify, iTunes or Amazon.

- [Do Something by Matthew West](#)
- [Set the World on Fire by Britt Nicole](#)
- [City on Our Knees by Toby Mac](#)
- [Follow You by Leeland](#)
- [God of this City by Chris Tomlin](#)
- [Give Me Your Eyes by Brandon Heath](#)

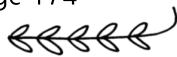
Pray with power

Personalize these powerful Scriptures for you and your neighbors...

- **Pray that you will be transparent and show your own need for a Savior:**
"This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it:
'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ

→→→→→
"There's no perfect
prayer formula;
there are no perfect
prayers or pray-ers."

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Your Neighbor
Without Being Weird
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Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life." 1 Timothy 1:15-6

- **Pray that you will be a good influence in your neighborhood:** " Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth." 2 Timothy 2:23-25
- **Pray for unity and cooperation in your community:** " Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose." Philippians 2:2
- **Pray that your neighbors would turn from darkness to light:** " [I am sending you] to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.'" Acts 26:18

»»»»»
BONUS! Download
a pretty prayer
printable at
[www.howtolove
yourneighbor.com/
pray](http://www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com/pray)



»»»»» prayers & praises «««««

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WEEK 2 meet

CHAPTER 2 welcome to your neighborhood

Next Best Steps

1. Is your neighborhood neighborly? Are you a good neighbor? Is your neighborhood friendly, or are you merely polite? Perhaps your neighborhood is decidedly unfriendly, or even dangerous. Do you have friends in your neighborhood? _____

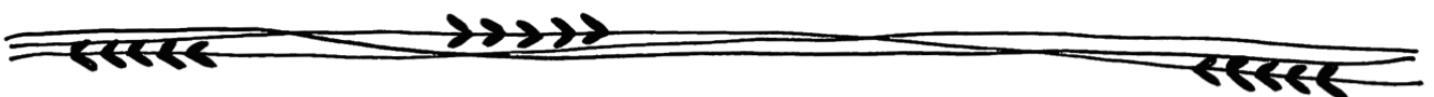
2. What assumptions have you made about your neighbors? Are these judgments based on personal interaction or casual observation? _____

3. Do due diligence by learning about your neighbors on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, etc. Then log off your computer and do something in real life. Displace a fraction of the time you spend online with real, live social interaction in the original social network: your neighborhood. How do you feel about meeting your neighbors face to face? Does initial excitement change to stress when you press the “sign out” button? _____

4. Do you use social media in healthy moderation? Does your family ever complain about how much you use your phone, computer, or tablet? Have you ever felt ignored or rejected because someone wouldn’t get off their phone? The next time you’re in a social situation—whether it’s the dinner table, the lunch line, or a fast-food joint—leave your phone behind and focus on the faces in front of you.

5. Read Matthew 22:37–40 and Matthew 7:12. Jesus said these commands (love God, love your neighbor, the Golden Rule) summarize the essence or heart of everything else written in the entire Bible. Measure your investment in your neighborhood in minutes, dollars, sweat, and prayers. Is your life in sync with God’s command? _____

6. Read John 20:11–18. In verse 16, Mary recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name. Recall a time when someone knew your name (or did not know your name) and how it made you feel. Practice using your neighbor’s name in a conversation this week. What happened? _____



why to meet your neighbor

Last week, Paul encouraged us to “season our conversation with salt”. You know what that means, right? We’re eventually going to have a real life, face-to-face conversation with a neighbor! And that’s not going to happen until we introduce ourselves and learn our neighbor’s name. It’s exactly what Jesus did for us: He left the comfort of Heaven, came to earth, and met us right where we are in our “everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life” (Romans 12:1 MSG). Thus began a journey to the cross and resurrection that we call The Gospel.

Even after His miraculous resurrection, Jesus never stopped meeting people right where they were. Let me set the scene in Luke 24. Two followers of Jesus witnessed His crucifixion three days earlier. They are now on the Road to Emmaus, headed home after these horrific events, when this happens—

Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.”

“What things?” Jesus asked.

“The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,” they said. “He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.”
Luke 24:15-21



The root word of “came” suggests linking arms with someone. What does this imply about Jesus’s intent in meeting these men?

- What emotions are expressed by Cleopas?
- Can you think of a neighbor who, like Cleopas and his friend, have been disillusioned by faith or have an incorrect view of Jesus?
- Jesus would eventually open the eyes of these two unsuspecting followers over a common meal. Why don’t you think this happened right away while on the road?
- It’s been said that the gospel “is not an event, it is a journey.” What does this mean to you?

In Luke 24, Jesus leaves us with a pattern to follow. The Emmaus Road is a Gospel Road. **Most people aren’t going to fall instantly on their knees at a sudden revelation of Jesus.** They gradually come to realize who He is over time, as believers link arms with them through life. Meet your neighbor, journey with them, experience the marvelous and the mundane, and let God reveal Himself through it.

And now, over 2,000 years later, here you are! Now it’s your turn. Time to leave the comforts of home, walk across the street, and meet someone right where they are. That, my friends, is how we perpetuate this beautiful Gospel. By meeting people.

how to meet your neighbor



“This is when you may have to swallow your pride and admit you don’t know your neighbor’s name, even if you’ve been casually chatting with them for years.”

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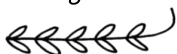
As you venture into your neighborhood to meet a neighbor, you might have to have that embarrassing conversation when you say, “I’m so sorry. I should know your name but I don’t recall. Could you tell me your name again?” Try these tips to remember your neighbor’s name for keeps:

1. Ask another neighbor for help.
2. Don't say you're terrible with names; it gives the impression that their name isn't worth remembering.
3. Repeat their name and use it in your conversation as often as you can without sounding unnatural.
4. If it's an unusual name or one that could be spelled several ways, ask them to spell it—this also helps burn their name into your brain.
5. Make a play on words: Create a mnemonic device (Bill lives on the hill) or alliteration (Peggy was petting a puppy) to help you remember.
6. Use their name when you say goodbye.
7. Tell them your name in case they’ve forgotten, too.
8. Write it down! Writing their name creates a visual memory. Create an address book just for your neighborhood. Record their names, addresses, their dogs’ names, what you talk about, when you met, any tidbit of trivia you can follow up on later.
9. Create a contact on your phone. I always add the word “NEIGHBOR” to my neighbors’ contact so I can search for them all together.
10. Make a neighborhood map and hang it in a prominent place in your home. Discuss it with your children and spouse and see who they know that you may not. Update the map as you meet new neighbors.



“A person’s name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”

Dale Carnegie



Go to neighborhood functions so you can meet people—neighborhood watch, community meetings, PTA meetings. Visit every yard sale and go to every jewelry party. Keep your head up, your eyes open, your ears tuned in to the sound of people outside your home. Play in the front yard instead of the back deck. Interact with people as they go past your home, and be intentional about getting their names.

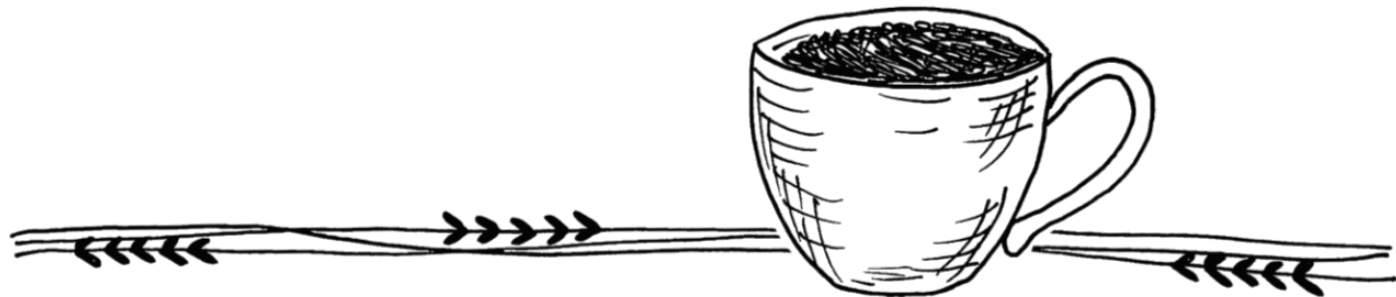
And as you meet your neighbors, don’t forget to bring these new names to the throne and pray for your neighbors!

BONUS! Download a free neighborhood map template at
www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com/freebies



Draw a map of the homes closest to yours, next door and across the street and in your back yard. If you live in an apartment, these are the units beside, above and below you. On a farm, these homes could be acres away. Now fill in your neighbor's names.

prayers & praises





CHAPTER 3 home sweet home

Next Best Steps

1. In your opinion, how is a home setting different than a church setting? Have you ever done a Bible study in a home? How was it different than the same kind of activity in a church? What are some pros and cons of each setting? _____

2. Do you know where your neighbors go to church? Make a list of the churches represented by your neighbors. What would happen on your street and in your community if these churches were unified and cooperating for the Kingdom? _____

3. Which group activities sound appealing to you? Brainstorm ideas on what you might do with your neighbors. Research additional ideas in Appendix A and B. _____

4. Which personal interactions sound best to you? Determine to do at least one of these activities in the next ten days. Record that date here: _____.
Describe what happened. _____

5. Pray specifically for each home in your neighborhood. Print or draw a map of your neighborhood and mark each house as you pray. Sleuth for clues about the family who lives there so you can pray for their needs. Do this together with your family or enlist another neighbor to pray with you.

why to talk to your neighbor

Now that we've met our neighbors, it's time for those seasoned, salty conversations to begin! Whether extroverted or introverted, Loving Your Neighbor involves social engagement. This could be checking in with an elderly neighbor or purposefully walking across the lawn to ask a fellow leaf-raker how his/her weekend went.

It is at this point that some of you might feel hesitant. You might worry that it will be awkward or you'll ask a wrong question. You might fear that since you've gone this long without engaging your neighbors, now it will feel forced.

There could be a million reasons you haven't talked to your neighbors. What are some of those reasons?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

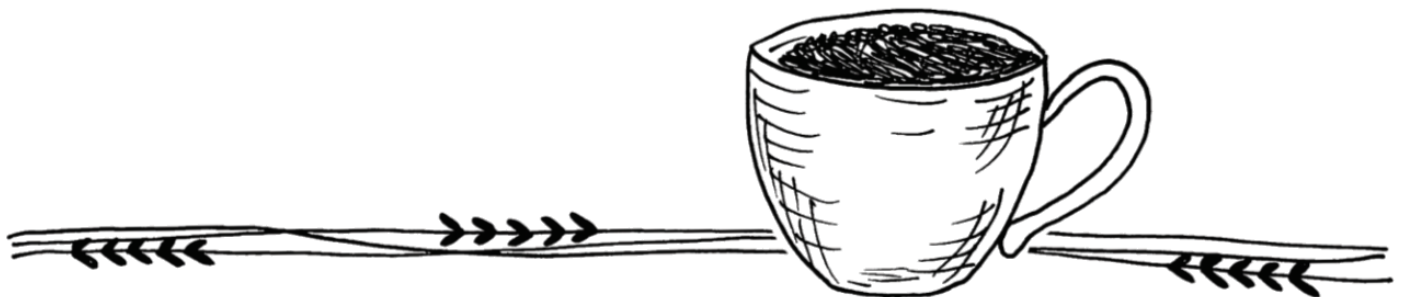
You are not alone! In fact, one of the most revered men in Scripture and in history felt insecure and unsure of his abilities. God Himself appeared to Moses, but Moses couldn't summon the courage to talk to someone as the Lord asked:

But Moses pleaded with the LORD, "O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled."

Then the LORD asked Moses, "Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say." Exodus 4:10-12

- What do you suppose Moses was feeling as he pled with God?
- Who is Moses focused on? Who does God focus on?
- Circle Moses' many weaknesses. Underline God's promises.

Moses was commanded to go talk to a big, scary Pharaoh holding the Israelites as slaves. You, on the other hand, are simply trying to strike up meaningful conversations with a neighbor. The fate of all of Christendom does not hang in



the balance, thank goodness! However, you may have experienced the insecurities and doubt that Moses expresses. We surely have!

- According to the passage, what is the remedy for such feelings?
- What is God's sole command in this passage?

Take heart, my friends! God never gives a command without wrapping it in a promise! He commands us to love our neighbor. Then, He promises that the rest is up to Him. Do not focus on your insecurity, focus on His ability! He will help you to speak. He will teach you what to say. He just needs you to be available and obedient. That's all He ever asks of us.

Now go... talk to your neighbor. Put the responsibility of what happens next on the God who parts the Red Sea!

how to talk to your neighbor



"Nine out of ten older people reported that a chat on the phone helps them overcome loneliness . . . but one in four have no one to talk to."

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Perhaps your neighbor is an elderly widow whose nights are long. Perhaps she's a single executive who works long hours. Perhaps she enjoys her solitude... and perhaps she needs a friend.

You can break the silence with your smart phone or a simple knock on their door. Here are some conversation starters—

- "I just called to say hello."
- "I haven't seen you for a while and wondered how you're doing."
- "I really enjoy talking to you. What have you been up to?"
- "How are you feeling?"
- "Do you enjoy the hot/cold/sunny/wet weather we've been having?"
- "I'm going to the store, what can I pick up for you?"
- "My kids are bringing you over a treat."
- "Are you ready for the [upcoming storm, holiday, etc.]?"
- "How can we help you today?"

Instead of vague questions, Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly in Chicago recommends you ask specific questions during inclement weather:

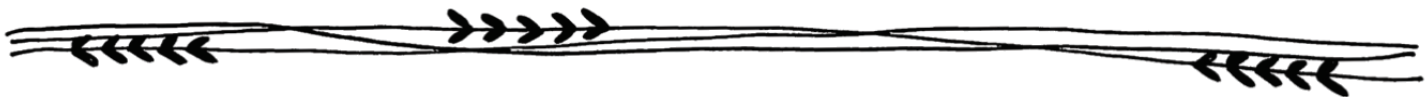
- "Is your heat/air conditioner working?"
- "Are you warm/cool enough?"
- "Do you have enough food to get through the next few days?"



Simply listen...listen long and hear your neighbor’s heart. Some people prefer a lot of small talk as a relationship develops, while others crave deep conversations about weighty topics. Become familiar with your own preference, and be sensitive to your neighbor’s God-given personality, too. Ask questions like these from Doug Pollock, author of [God Space](#):

- Would you mind sharing with me the greatest piece of wisdom ever passed on to you?
- What do you like most about what you do? Least?
- What kind of exposure did you have to religion when you were growing up?
- Based on your understanding, how does someone become a Christian?
- Do you believe there is a solution to social problems such as rape, murder, famine, war, racism, and divorce?
- What have you learned about yourself through marriage?
- Do you think it’s easier or harder to raise kids in today’s world than it was when you were growing up?

BONUS! Visit www.godsgps.com/wondering-questions to download 99 conversation starters as well as 20 questions to ask a neighbor who has moved from a different culture.



prayers & praises

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WEEK 4 hang out

CHAPTER 4 don't be weird

Next Best Steps

1. Is your neighborhood diverse? Describe the different people groups in your neighborhood.

2. Can you be honest about your preconceptions about your neighbors who are different from you? Ask God to reveal anything that is keeping you from loving your neighbors.

3. What do you think your neighbors think about you? Now, what do you *know* your neighbors think about you based on firsthand conversations and interactions with them? Do you make assumptions about their assumptions? _____

4. Read Acts 18–19 to see how Paul moved in all seven areas of culture.
5. What media is used in your community? Identify the seven areas of culture in your local media.

6. Check all occupations or interests on page 91 where you have influence, experience, expertise, opportunity, or passion. Write the one area where you have the most influence. _____
7. Which of these areas are the most pressing concerns for your neighbors? What conversations are they having on all sides of these issues? _____

8. How can you get involved in these areas to make a difference and deepen relationships in your community? _____

9. If you're married, how does your spouse feel about relationships in your neighborhood? Will loving your neighbor be a source of conflict or collaboration in your home? _____

10. What did your church say when you approached them about loving your neighbor? Will they partner with you in practical and spiritual ways? _____

why to hang out with your neighbor

The Book of John reads like a Greek play, with Jesus as its main character. There is even a narrator who begins the book with a prologue, where we find a little verse with profound implications—

*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.
John 1:14 MSG*

The word “moved” in the original Greek language means that Jesus “pitched His tent.” Leaving His home in heaven, He shoved wooden tent pegs into the hard ground of our sin-cursed earth, and began hanging out with us.

Jesus ate in the homes of despised tax collectors, served a meal on a mountaintop, stirred deep conversations at the local synagogue, lingered at the neighborhood watering spot to talk to a lonely woman, hiked the beautiful countryside with His friends, dined with friends in their kitchens, and wept with the community at gravesites. Jesus never stopped hanging out.

You live near your neighbors... but do you live “with” them? Do you hang out in their world, or insist they transform to yours?

After 30 years of living among His neighbors, Jesus made His debut as The Messiah and performed His first miracle.

The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.”

“Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions.

When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”

This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples. John 2:1-12

- What is the significance of Jesus intentionally performing His first miracle at a wedding?





“The two most important things you can do to make your neighborhood safer are to get to know your neighbors’ names and to get out of your house.”

How to Love
Your Neighbor
Without Being Weird
page 115



- What needs were met by this miracle?
- What do you learn about Jesus’ character, what is important to Him, from this story?
- How could you apply this example to hanging out with your own neighbors?

Does Jesus’ reply to Mary seem rude to you? Actually, He used a term of endearment to let Mary know He was transitioning from her Son to her Savior. A miracle would be performed because it was part of His Divine Strategy—not because His mother requested it.

Jesus chose an everyday event to enhance His relationships with the people around Him. In the same way, hanging out with our neighbors enhances our relationship with them. We were just neighbors, now we are friends.

Not sure how to reach your neighbors with the love of Jesus? Hang out with them. Laugh with your neighbors. Celebrate with your neighbors. It is, quite literally, the answer to the question, “What would Jesus do?”

how to hang out with your neighbor

This playful and prophetic Old Testament passage describes God’s ideal vision of community—

A Message from God-of-the-Angel-Armies: “Old men and old women will come back to Jerusalem, sit on benches on the streets and spin tales, move around safely with their canes—a good city to grow old in. And boys and girls will fill the public parks, laughing and playing—a good city to grow up in.” Zechariah 8:4-5 The Message

Enjoying a walk together or playing a game in the park are more than mindless ways to pass the time: play is actually a sign of peace, safety and strength in your community.

Here are 45 ways to get out of the house and hang out with your neighbors today. There are low-cost and no-cost ideas on this list that are perfect for introverts and extroverts, athletes and artists. Circle one activity you will initiate with a neighbor this week:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Play 18-holes of miniature golf | 7. Take a gardening class | 15. Watch a play |
| 2. Take your dogs to the dog park | 8. Take an art class | 16. Go to the theater |
| 3. Plan an evening of board games | 9. Take self-defense training | 17. Attend a lecture |
| 4. Play card games | 10. Go to the zoo | 18. Attend a conference |
| 5. Take a cooking class | 11. Watch a parade | 19. Enjoy an art exhibit |
| 6. Take an exercise class | 12. Sing karaoke | 20. Attend a gallery opening |
| | 13. Visit a museum | 21. Go to a book signing |
| | 14. Take in a music concert | 22. See a movie |

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 23. Cheer for a high school sporting event | 30. Go boating | 38. Play basketball |
| 24. Go to a professional sporting event | 31. Go golfing | 39. Play dodgeball |
| 25. Go to a college game | 32. Go skiing | 40. Play kickball |
| 26. Participate in a park league | 33. Go horseback riding | 41. Play flag football |
| 27. Go hiking | 34. Go ice skating | 42. Visit a gun range |
| 28. Go biking | 35. Go bowling | 43. Go shopping |
| 29. Go fishing | 36. Go swimming | 44. Tour a winery |
| | 37. Play softball | 45. Take a walk |

Check your local newspaper, school website and park department website for fun things to do with a neighbor, and ask your Facebook friends for tips. [According to Helpguide.org](http://AccordingtoHelpguide.org), playing and hanging out provides these 15 benefits:

1. Relieves stress
2. Improves brain function
3. Stimulates the mind and boost creativity
4. Improves relationships and your connection to others
5. Keeps you feeling young and energetic
6. Develops and improve social skills
7. Teaches cooperation with others
8. Heals emotional wounds
9. Boosts productivity and innovation
10. Keeps you functional when under stress
11. Refreshes your mind and body
12. Encourages teamwork
13. Helps you see problems in new ways
14. Triggers creativity and innovation
15. Prevents burnout



Neighbors who play together stay together!

»»»»» prayers & praises «««««



CHAPTER 5 fears & excuses

Next Best Steps

1. Do you get distracted? Keep a log of the activities that waste the time you could spend loving your neighbor. Ask someone to keep you accountable for the minutes of your day. _____

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Have you ever stifled the Holy Spirit? What clear directive has He given you that you've ignored? _____

3. What are your personal fears and excuses about loving your neighbor? Is there actual evidence to support your fears, or are they a figment of your imagination? _____

4. Have you ever been put on the spot by a tough question? What was it? How did you respond? Have you been the one asking tough questions? How did others' answers draw you toward or push you away from Christ? _____

5. Practice sharing one aspect of your testimony. Include enough details of your shady past so that people can truly relate, but don't draw word pictures that could create temptation or cause unnecessary pain or embarrassment to others. The subject is God's grace, not the gory details. _____

6. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for your home—no matter how you feel about its amenities. List its positive attributes and thank God for the gift of shelter. Ask Him how you can use your home for His glory. _____

7. Describe the safety of your neighborhood. What common-sense steps can you take to protect yourself as you love your neighbor? _____

8. How many "ergs" (a unit of work or energy) do you expend in your neighborhood? What literal, visible, measurable, and practical actions have you taken to love your neighbor? _____

why to eat with your neighbor

Everybody eats! In the New Testament, Matthew mentions eating 20 times. Mark talks about eating 26 times, Luke 31 times, John 14 times and Paul 22 times in 1 Corinthians! Jesus ate (Luke 24:43); Jesus even cooked (John 21:9). In the Bible, eating together is a sign of unity and community. Someday we'll sit together in Heaven for a big feast!

While many people may avoid overtly "churchy" invitations, an invitation into your home or into your coffee break is vulnerability they will respect. **They may disagree with your theology, but they will think well of your hospitality.** We can gently, respectfully, build bridges through this common yet intimate custom of breaking bread and sipping tea—bridges that will someday lead to an opportunity to explain the hope that we have.

...you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! 1 Peter 3: 15-17

- What is "your hope as a believer"?
- How would you explain that hope?
- How do we protect ourselves from bad opinions as we try to live our faith in front of people?

How can we be "ready" to explain the hope of the gospel? Here are three common approaches:

1. Wait for your neighbor to knock on your door and ask about Jesus.
 2. Force your agenda, beliefs and opinions upon people.
 3. Create redemptive relationships based on trust and concern.
- Which of these have you tried in the past? Have you been successful? How or how not?
 - Has someone ever tried one of these approaches with you? How did it make you feel?

Eating with neighbors is an investment in future opportunity to share the hope of Jesus.

You have a neighbor who is desperate for hope, I guarantee it... and, she's hungry at least three times a day.



how to eat with your neighbor

Here are several ways you can initiate a meal with a neighbor. Choose one:

Have a big party

- Invite several homes over to eat together. Tell your neighbors you're inviting others so they catch the excitement.
- If anyone offers to bring something, have a ready list of suggestions such as bread, salad, soda pop, ice cream, or an appetizer.
- Host a pizza potluck, where everyone brings their favorite homemade, store-bought or restaurant pizza to share. Supply salad, chips, drinks and brownies for a complete meal.
- To accommodate many different tastes, serve a taco bar or pasta bar. Search for inspiration on Pinterest.
- Have a dessert party! Make an ice cream sundae bar with all the toppings.

There's no better time to use your good china... but don't hesitate to use your "best" paper plates. If you're stressed, your guests will sense it.

Host a small gathering

- Invite one neighbor for breakfast. It's less intimidating to share a morning meal that doesn't have four courses. Breakfast recipes tend to be simple to cook and affordable to make. Search for recipes at these websites if you need inspiration:

Allrecipes.com

FoodNetwork.com

food.com

TheKitchn.com

Yummly.com

- Splurge on a fancy little dessert and invite a neighbor to share it with you. Coffee and cookies counts!
- Be impromptu. Having meatballs for breakfast at my neighbor's home one Christmas Eve is a special memory, and it only happened because she was spontaneous and kind.

Go out to eat

- Try a new place or a tried-and-true favorite together.
- Driving separately can be easier if you don't know each other well.
- Sharing a coupon or lunch special is the perfect excuse to invite a neighbor out to eat.



Please visit my friends' websites for more ideas about hospitality at home!

KristinSchell.com - I'm on an exciting adventure learning to love my neighbors. It all started when I put a picnic table in my front yard, painted it turquoise, and began inviting neighbors, friends, and even strangers to hang out and do life together at The Turquoise Table. Now we have a thriving community of Front Yard People who are committed to love where they live. Come join us!

GraceTable.org - We are people who love God, who love communion and who love a good dinner table conversation. We are storytellers who love food. We're chefs, short-order cooks, soup stirrers, and birthday cake makers. We are kitchen people and grill masters. We make gourmet breakfasts and serve cereal for dinner. We are passionate about faith and food. We're hungry for a table where grace is said and passed, like a warm basket full of rolls. Come break bread with us - we've saved you a seat.

EntertainingforEternity.com - We live in a world of people who are starved for connectedness and real caring relationships. Our homes no matter how humble they may be are a place where we can share the love of Christ. It's my hope and prayer that this website and companion book will motivate you to prop open your front door, put out the welcome mat and start asking your neighbors, work associates and casual acquaintances in for some real caring over a cup of something yummy or maybe even a simple meal.

NeighborsTable.com - We build more than outdoor handcrafted tables. This is a movement of ordinary people loving extraordinarily around the table. Join us.

MakingLifeSweet.com - Lauren Gaskill has a lot going on: she's an inspirational writer, editor, Christian speaker and food blogger with a passion for inspiring people, and helping others overcome chronic illness, grow in their faith and experiment in the kitchen. Her blog, Making Life Sweet, is delicious!

Commit

Now that you're inspired, let's make it real. Commit to a meal you'll share with a neighbor:

Guest(s) to invite: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Menu/Theme: _____

»»»» prayers & praises ««««

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

WEEK 6 *Love*

CHAPTER 6 *it's all spiritual*

Next Best Steps

1. Has your neighborhood ever been hit hard by a crisis? Have you seen beauty rise from the ashes of a fire, flood, tornado, hurricane, crime, or economic collapse? _____

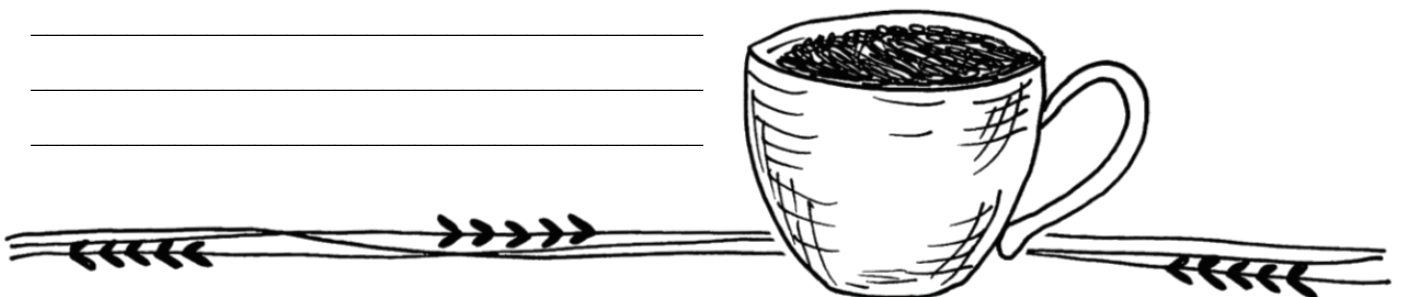
2. What's the economic climate in your community? How has it impacted you personally? Has it affected your neighbors any differently? _____

3. How can you personally support your local economy? List stores, services, and civic issues you can support. _____

4. Have you been affected by a crime in your home? How do your neighbors look out for each other? What can you do to help neighbors get to know each other's names and be involved in your neighborhood? _____

5. Picture your most obnoxious neighbor, then pray a blessing over them. Post a reminder or set an alarm to pray this blessing for them three times a week. _____

6. What is your reputation in your neighborhood? Are you the grumpy neighbor or the fanatic? Or are you the nice one? Maybe you're completely unknown. Think about what you would like to be known for in your neighborhood, and pray for this as you pray for your neighbor each day.



Why to serve your neighbor



A mystery is uncovered and a power unleashed when we meet the needs of our community. Look at the incredible promise of Isaiah:

If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. Isaiah 58:10-12

- Underline the promises God makes to those who serve others.
- God asks us to “spend ourselves” on behalf of the needy. In what ways are we spent when we serve?

What a beautiful heart cry for our community—to serve them in such a way that our light rises from the darkness! For the name “Christian” to be synonymous with “Repairer” and “Restorer” instead of “bigot” or “judgmental.”

This hits close to home in these divisive times.

But notice that it’s not simply the gospel or a verbal call to repentance that brings about such miracles. It is serving. **These promises are activated when you become active.** Feeding people. Solving problems. Working for others. Spending yourself, sacrificing your time, effort and skill.

God’s call to serve isn’t so that He can keep score of our goodness. It’s a common axiom that when you meet physical needs, you can more easily meet the spiritual needs. Why serve our neighbors?

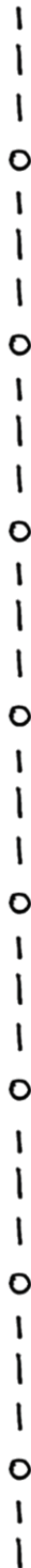
Because being “builders of walls” creates bridges into hearts that desperately need Jesus.

how to serve your neighbor

Here are over 30 ways you can make an immediate impact by serving in your community. At least one of them is guaranteed to make your heart go pitter-patter! Perhaps you’re already serving and volunteering in one of these arenas, and can share with your group about a cause or organization. Circle one area you will pursue to serve your neighbor:

Serve with your hands

- Volunteer as a crossing guard or help with the after-school program at your local elementary school, or tutor high school students.



- Assist shoppers at a food pantry and help restock the shelves.
- Play games with children at a homeless shelter.
- Be a friendly greeter to women and families visiting a pregnancy service center.
- Clean pens or groom animals at an animal shelter.
- Serve a meal then sit alongside folks dining at a soup kitchen.
- Read to the elderly or infirm at a nursing home—and listen to their stories, too.
- Deliver a hot meal to [Meals on Wheels](#) recipients.
- Schedule donors for a [Red Cross](#) blood drive.
- Pick up litter or guide tours through your parks department.
- Pick up trash in your neighborhood or weed a public flower bed. Trash attracts more trash, and by cleaning it up you send a message that people care about your neighborhood.
- Intentionally serve outside your usual church circles. Visit [VolunteerMatch.org](#) to find a variety of opportunities to serve at charitable, civic, social, educational, governmental, and political organizations.

Serve on your knees

- Learn about the needs of the people who are served by a local charitable organization or cause, and commit to pray for them regularly.
- Learn the organization's regular operational needs, and pray that God would provide for them.
- Send the organization an encouraging card to let them know you are praying for them.

Serve with your mouth

- Publicize the needs of your charity or cause of choice. Talk to others about how they can help, too. Share newsletters with friends. Post their activity on social media.
- Be their advocate in the community. Think of people you know who might be interested in this cause, and make these introductions and connections.

Serve with your mind

- Offer your skills - design a poster, create a website, serve on an advisory board, or make phone calls in your spare time.
- Look for ways to use your spiritual gifts in civic organizations.

Serve with your wallet

- Consider making a regular financial contribution for several months.
- Donate household goods to local charities, give food to pantries, deliver pet food to animal shelters. Find out what needs you can meet on your budget.



- Supporting local school and park levies is a unique way to love your neighbor. Even if you don't have children in the school system or you don't use the parks, any investment in your community pays dividends in increased property values and opportunities for others.

"I don't have time."

Serving our neighbor takes time. When I pulled out every excuse in the book about why I didn't have time, God showed me who was *really* in control of my calendar. My work was fraught with setbacks and struggles; at home, I couldn't keep my house clean or get dinner on the table. My personal time with God was practically nonexistent. For every minute I hoarded, two more were wasted on silly goof-ups and dumb mistakes.

Our excuses about our time are legit: our calendars really *are* crowded. But since there's no exception clause to the "love your neighbor" command, we simply have to find time to comply. If you carve out the time, God will honor your commitment *and* bless your community. It's a win-win!

Commit

When will you serve your neighbor? Write the details here.

Organization: _____

Phone Number: _____

Website: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Notes: _____

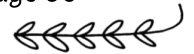
Date I will serve: _____

Time I will serve: _____



"I was afraid to lay my daily planner on the altar. I wanted to make my own plans and be in charge of my own day. But an amazing thing happened when I finally made the time to get to know my neighbors: God magnified each minute."

How to Love
Your Neighbor
Without Being Weird
page 96



prayers & praises



WEEK 7 *help*

CHAPTER 7 *unwrapping your gifts*

Next Best Steps

1. Write the gifts that resonate with you or make your heart beat a little bit faster. Or, if someone comes to mind, write their name beside their gift. _____

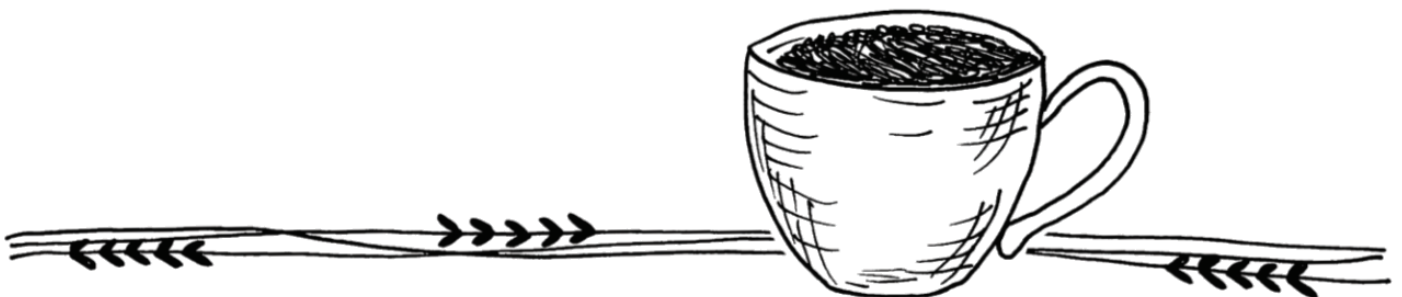
2. What does your church do to reach those outside the church? What do you do personally to reach people outside the church? _____

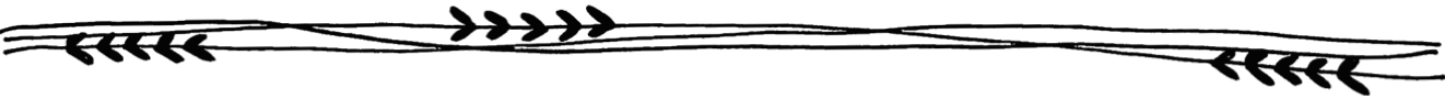
3. Take an online quiz to help you unwrap your spiritual gifts, ask your church leaders if they administer or recommend a particular test, or ask a close friend to help identify your gifts.

4. How are you using your gifts at church? At work? At home?
5. What is your, “Woe is me if I do not _____!”? Fill in the blank with a passion God has planted in your soul. Don’t hyper-spiritualize your response: your woe can be a very practical calling like quilting, making cakes, writing poems, fixing cars, or playing sports.

6. How can your spiritual gifts be used very practically and naturally to love your neighbor? Make a list that matches your gift(s) to a very specific neighbor’s need. What is the next best step you need to put this gift to use? _____

7. What projects could you work on together with your neighbors to utilize each person’s spiritual gifts?





why to help your neighbor

A great way to love your neighbor is to help your neighbor. We talked last week about serving our neighborhoods and our communities, but we *help* a neighbor as an individual. Helping seems so simple, but it's truly earth-shattering. Our helping will have eternal benefit when it begins with compassion. For many of us, this means a drastic change of heart before we ever set foot out the door.

How did Jesus help?

As Jesus and the disciples left the town of Jericho, a large crowd followed behind. Two blind men were sitting beside the road. When they heard that Jesus was coming that way, they began shouting, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

"Be quiet!" the crowd yelled at them.

But they only shouted louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

When Jesus heard them, he stopped and called, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord," they said, "we want to see!" Jesus felt sorry for them and touched their eyes. Instantly they could see! Then they followed him.

Matthew 20:30-34

The timing of this story is crucial. Jesus has just told His disciples that He was going to be betrayed, mocked, and crucified soon. His journey to the cross has begun. Jesus is fully aware that each step brings Him closer to His ominous future. And yet, these men needed His help.

- What physical and cultural hardships did these two men face because of their blindness?
- What is the crowd's reaction to their plight?
- What motivates Jesus? And what does He do?
- Does Jesus need to touch someone to heal them? Why does He do it?
- It is so easy to look at these passages as "stories". But, really, each story reveals something about Jesus' character. What do we learn of His character here?
- The original Hebrew states that Jesus was "moved deeply to compassion". When you look at your neighbors, are you moved like this?

Jesus' profound compassion propels Him to physical action in one fluid movement. He has, several times, healed people with His words. But here, He stops. He touches. With one eye on the cross and eternity, He stopped to physically help in the present moment.

Many of us are good helpers in our neighborhood. But, do we truly understand that the physical act of putting aside our agenda to meet a physical need could lead to the gospel down the road?

Some of us are highly motivated to share the gospel, but have not spent the time investing in our neighbors and helping meet their practical needs.

Let's help like Jesus...with our hands reaching out to help and our feet walking toward eternity.

how to help your neighbor

When my (Amy's) husband was injured in a home accident, our neighbors helped us in more ways than one. When one neighbor shouted for help, another came running with her husband—who is also a doctor. An emergency room nurse who lived one street over offered to make a house call, and another neighbor brought still-warm brownies when she learned what happened. As he recovered at home, a neighbor kindly stopped jackhammering their patio so he could rest.

20 tips to be a helpful neighbor:

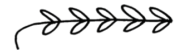
1. Call a neighbor the next time you're going to the grocery store, post office, hardware store, or mall and offer to pick up any items they might need. Better yet, invite them to come along.
2. On a rainy day, deliver your neighbor's newspaper or mail to her door with a plate of cookies—or a card that says, "Stay warm and dry!"
3. Carry your neighbor's trash cans back to their house.
4. Carpool to work together.
5. Take the neighbor kids to school on cold or inclement days.
6. Be available for latchkey kids for an hour or two after school. Make them a snack and ask about their homework.
7. Share your wireless internet connection (make sure this isn't against your internet service provider's terms of service).
8. Help carry in groceries.
9. Rake and bag their leaves in the fall.
10. Weed your neighbor's flowerbeds, water their lawn or help them plant flowers.
11. Mow their lawn, then go the extra mile and trim the edges.
12. Shovel their sidewalk, driveway and porch, and sprinkle with salt if they'd like.
13. Scrape the frost off their car on a cold morning.
14. Share the dandelion spray—no one wants a yard full of weeds, but some neighbors might not know how to get rid of them or be able to afford it.



15. Listen to your neighbor. You don't have to solve their problems, just hear their heart.
16. Teach a skill like cooking, sewing, scrapbooking, gardening.
17. Lend a tool or a book without expecting it back.
18. Help with a home improvement project.
19. Take them a meal if they're sick—or for no reason at all!
20. Share coupons you aren't using (or sacrifice ones you would like to use).

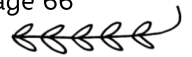
Each of these tips costs nothing, yet they are very costly. You'll pay with your time, you'll sacrifice something you could be doing for yourself or your family. Yet the dividends are priceless!

Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" —Romans 15:2 MSG



"Don't forget to ask for help: Ask if you can borrow an ingredient or a tool, or ask for a helping hand with a household task. Dependence is a hallmark of community, not an admission of weakness."

How to Love
Your Neighbor
Without Being Weird
page 66



prayers & praises

WEEK 8 give

CHAPTER 8 say what?

Next Best Steps

1. How do you try to “live properly among your unbelieving neighbors” as it says in 1 Peter 2:12? Have you ever been falsely accused by a neighbor? Have you ever been vindicated by your reputation and actions?

2. What scares you about having the first conversation with a neighbor you’ve never met before? Read John 12:49. Have you ever felt that God showed you what to say and how to say it?

3. Write a sample script you will use as a starting point. Rehearse it. Smile while you say it. Now tear it up and say a prayer that God will give you words to speak. _____

4. Read the story of how Abigail saved her neighborhood in 1 Samuel 25. Do you have a “Nabal” in your neighborhood who endangers others? Have you ever appeased someone—or been appeased yourself—by a gift or kind gesture? _____

5. Have you ever been honored by an invitation to someone’s home? How did Esther’s invitation to the king in Esther 5 and 7 affect their relationship? _____

6. Circle a date on your calendar when you will knock on one neighbor’s door to introduce yourself. Tell one friend about your commitment and ask them to hold you accountable. _____





why to give a gift to your neighbor

As Christians, our very title means that we represent Christ. We may be ineffective or effective to varying degrees, but the truth is inescapable: our neighbors learn the will and intent of Christ through us.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV

- What does being an ambassador for Christ mean to you? What does that look like?
- What is God's message through us to the world we live in?


First of all, take immense joy and comfort in knowing that, as ambassadors, you and I are appointed! Think of it. You don't work at your job, you are appointed to it. You don't just raise your family, you are appointed to your kids and spouse. You don't just live in your neighborhood. You are appointed. You are here on purpose. Not someone else with a seminary degree or apologetics training. You! God thinks you are the best person for the job! When we feel insecure, this verse reminds us that God believes in us and placed us in our neighborhood on purpose.

Secondly, you and I are not just Christians who go to church and read our Bibles. We are Messengers of Reconciliation! This is a message for "others"... for outsiders. It requires us to step out from our Christian circles and engage the world around us. It is also a very positive, hope-filled message. Jesus said,

God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:17

An ambassador does not shake hands with a foreign ruler then launch right into nuclear disarmament or trade embargoes. They start with a simple gesture of goodwill. They give each other gifts.

As Christ's ambassador, you represent a spiritual, eternal kingdom but you operate in a physical, concrete world. Your neighbor doesn't know the importance of the cross or the Great Commission. But they sure do love gifts. As a Messenger of Reconciliation, a simple gift is a gesture of goodwill, hope, and friendship that opens doors and softens hearts.



Giving a gift can open doors; it gives access to important people!

Proverbs 18:16



how to give a gift to your neighbor

If you don't know your neighbor well (or at all!), having a little gift for them gives you something to talk about as soon as the door is opened. It's an instant ice breaker.

How did you feel the last time someone gave you an unexpected gift? Just last week, Donna gave me a vintage dish towel that matches my kitchen, Bettie gave me a pair of socks to go with a new sweater, and Michelle gave me a bowl of soup made just the way I like it. I was warmed from the inside out and from head to toe! The following gift ideas are appropriate even if you haven't met your neighbor before - and if you do know them, try to choose a gift that speaks to their interests, needs or hobbies. A gift doesn't have to be expensive in order to be precious, and it doesn't have to be elaborate to be appreciated.

8 adorable, affordable gift ideas for your neighbors

1. A mug with an individual packet of instant coffee, a K-cup, tea bag or cocoa mix
2. Candy, cookies or a cupcake
3. Flowers, a houseplant, seed packets or an artificial flower
4. Car accessories (ice scraper, air freshener, cleaning wipes)
5. Children's drawing (getting your children involved is a beautiful way to teach them to love their neighbor!)
6. Sample-sized soaps or lotions
7. Home fragrance, candle, scented sprays
8. Holiday gifts such as a Valentine card, Christmas ornament, Easter egg, Independence Day flag, etc.

You can find endless crafty gifts on Pinterest, or pick up a token of your affection at Hobby Lobby (download a coupon at www.hobbylobby.com/find-savings). Include a little tag with your name, possibly your phone number and address. A couple of common sense safety tips when you deliver a gift to your neighbor—

- Ask for his wife/girlfriend/mother if a male answers
- Never go inside unless another woman is present
- Tell someone where you're going and take your phone

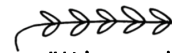
That seems easy enough, doesn't it? It's kinda fun to think about putting together a simple little package to brighten a neighbor's day. But then... there comes a moment... when you realize you are going to actually have to **knock on their door!** You will probably be terrified. I know I was! But you can do this, I know you can. Just say this,



"Hi, I'm [insert your name] and I live right over there [point to your home]. I just came by to say Happy Valentine's Day and give you this [thrust gift at them and run]."

OK, I'm just kidding - don't run away. Stick around for a couple of minutes to talk about the weather and how things are going in the neighborhood. There's an eensy-weensy chance they will be curmudgeonly or cranky, but you are not responsible for their response—only for your creative obedience to Christ's #2 command.

In my experience knocking on my neighbors' doors, they will be delighted! Your kindness could come at the exact moment they need to know someone cares about them, and your knock could open the door to a new friendship.



"It's easier to knock on your neighbor's door with one hand when you're holding a gift in the other."

How to Love
Your Neighbor
Without Being Weird
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prayers & praises



WEEK 9 Welcome

CHAPTER 9 Martha unleashed

Next Best Steps

1. What is your favorite home you've lived in? What's your favorite neighborhood you've lived in? As you've chosen where to live, did you consider the neighbors or just the neighborhood?

2. What distracts you from paying attention to people? How can you refocus and realign your priorities?

3. Do you relate to Martha's frustration when she was doing all the work? Where do you feel like you're working all alone, with no one to help? Could this be an unimportant area that needs to be done differently? _____

4. Do you see service as an honor or a duty? Do you serve happily or do you feel put upon? Where do you most enjoy serving? _____

5. Are you an entertainer, or do you practice hospitality—or have you figured out how to balance both? Think of a time when you or your host was stressed by entertaining. Remember a time when you were refreshed by someone's hospitality. _____

6. On a scale of 1–10, how prepared are you to welcome guests into your home—in Jesus' honor?

1	3	5	7	10
There should be a TV show about my house	Mortified	Slightly embarrassed	Just a sec while I shove this mess under the couch	Come on in!
7. How much time do you spend caring for your home each week? Do you feel this is excessive, not enough, or just right? Does your family agree? _____



Why to welcome your neighbor

Nothing says “love your neighbor” quite like welcoming them into our homes. It’s easy to think that hospitality is only a job for those who love arranging flowers and creating elaborate tables. But did you know that hospitality in the Bible was not about impressive centerpieces and spotless homes? It was about survival and reflecting God’s character.

Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:33-34

In those days, travelling was very dangerous. There were no hotels or rest stops. Strangers would have to knock on doors and put their entire trust in the hospitality of the homeowner. God required the Israelites to show grace because they were once foreigners until God opened up His heart to them.

- How does hospitality reflect the gospel today?

Fast forward to the New Testament. Peter has an urgent message to give to the church.

The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. 1 Peter 4:7-9

- Underline the “commands” Peter gives in this passage.

Intriguing, isn’t it? Peter begins with “the end of the world is coming soon”. Well, that’s enough to send me running for the panic room with some canned goods and water bottles. But no, he urged us to pray and to love through hospitality in these troubled times.

Peter was one of the founding members of the early church, which we read about in the book of Acts—

And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 2:44-47

- What did the first believers do so well?
- What was the direct effect of their hospitality?

Hospitality so reflects the gospel that outsiders were impressed. They, I am sure, expected Christians to show grace toward one another, but it was their grace toward outsiders that made the greatest impact.

Today, we have all but lost the art and discipline of hospitality. Our neighbors don't need fancy spreads. They are weary travelers, their feet laden with the dust of this world. They are lost on a treacherous road. In a world of isolation and stress, your home stands in stark contrast as a beacon of light, a refuge for sojourners, a pause in the madness to take refreshment. If we want so desperately for God to add to our number, we must be willing to live the gospel by opening our homes to those around us no matter their race, creed, or religion.

how to welcome your neighbor



"How do we go from wishful thinking about loving our neighbor to actually having women sipping coffee around our kitchen tables? We need Martha Stewart to team up with Billy Graham to write *Loving Your Neighbor for Dummies!*"

How to Love
Your Neighbor
Without Being Weird
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When women weren't lining up at my door to be my friend, I realized I was going to have to go to theirs. After a lot of internal debate and downright disobedience, I finally invited 89 neighbors over for coffee.

Yup. 89.

Please hear me: You don't have to do that! You can invite one single person over for a cookie. The point is quality, not quantity. I host an Open House once or twice a year, usually in fall and winter, and I enjoy the efficiency of meeting many neighbors at once. I serve coffee and store-bought cookies on paper plates—nothing fancy. Other times, I invite one neighbor over for a glass of tea on the back porch.

From intimate gatherings to larger parties, these tips will help you be a successful hostess:

The Invitation

I don't ask for an RSVP to my Open Houses. I want my neighbors to feel like they can stop in even if they haven't called me—and, besides, I've found that people just don't do it.

If you're having an Open House, pass out the invitation two to three weeks prior. For an impromptu dinner, you only need an hour or so notice! Don't let over-planning rob the joy out of hospitality.

Who to invite?

Use your neighborhood map determine who you will invite. While a personal invitation is most powerful, you can also post information on your neighborhood Facebook or NextDoor group, or on Meetup.

How many?

Of the 89 neighbors to my first Open House, 18 came. Typically, about one in five of your neighbors will respond to your invitation.



Cast a wide net if you want a full house!

Don't be discouraged if not many people respond to your invitation, or if they say they'll be there then don't come. Remember, you are not responsible for their response—only for your creative obedience to Christ's #2 command.

When?

Pay attention to the traffic patterns in your neighborhood. When are people home? Unfortunately, there's no perfect time—so just choose the time that works best for you.

How long?

Gathering or 60-90 minutes is enough to get to know one another; much longer than that puts a strain on everyone's calendar.

Now, you're ready to follow Jesus' party-planning strategy—

Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see. Matthew 22:9



"A personal invitation delivered face-to-face is the most time-consuming yet most effective way to invite your neighbors into your life—you can stuff mailboxes, but the result won't be the same. Don't depend on depersonalized mass communication or electronic media to deliver a personal message."

How to Love
Your Neighbor
Without Being Weird
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BONUS! download free Open House invitations at
www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com/cafe



»»»» prayers & praises ««««



WEEK 10 *encourage*

CHAPTER 10 *your neighborhood strategy*

Next Best Steps

1. Have you ever experienced an “end of the world as you know it” moment? What happened? How did you get through it? Are any of your neighbors going through something similar?

2. Read warnings that the end of the world is coming soon in Mark 13; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3; and Revelation 21:1–4. How has the 2,000+ year wait lessened our sense of urgency?

3. Read Luke 12:16–21. Do you think people are prone to “eat, drink, and be merry” because they think they have plenty of years to enjoy life? _____

4. Use your neighborhood map to pray specifically, earnestly and diligently over the homes closest to you. Choose one home a day to remember in prayer. _____

5. How can you stretch your love toward a neighbor whose world is collapsing? What will it cost you?

6. Have your gifts ever gotten you into trouble? What do you need to do to surrender your gifts for God’s glory? What gifts, abilities, and resources has God given you that you can cheerfully share with others?

7. If you knew Jesus was coming next week—or you were going to see Him!—what would you do differently in your neighborhood? _____



Why to encourage your neighbor

For ten weeks, you have been praying for the neighbors God has purposely and strategically placed in your path. Something miraculous happens on this journey... your neighbors begin letting you in. You see their homes, then you see their hurts. What a wonderful opportunity you have to love your neighbor by encouraging them!

Do you remember that verse from Colossians in Week 1? We used it as a prayer for our neighbors, but it comes full circle now! Those prayers have led to deeper relationships and a deeper awareness of our friends' needs. Let's look again, with fresh eyes...

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:2-6 NIV

The Message translation says,

Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out. Colossians 4:6

- Underline the goal as we engage our neighbors.
- When is it tempting to put them down?
- What does it mean to cut them out?

Sharing the love of Jesus happens in the real world of your neighborhood. It can be complicated. When you invite that new friend over for coffee, she'll complain about her husband. As you show hospitality to a couple from down the street, they'll go off about a neighbor with a barking dog. While meeting a neighbor, you may find you have absolutely nothing in common.

- What are negative ways that we react to such situations?
- How can we use Colossians 4 to encourage our neighbors in these circumstances?

If we lived our lives through the filter of this passage, what a difference we would make!

Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night. Philippians 2: 14-16 MSG

- Underline the words that describe the believers.
- Circle the words that describe the world.

Encouragement doesn't just uplift people: it shocks them! Cheerfully and readily encouraging your neighbors provides a stark contrast to the gloomy world around you. You shine! You can be a breath of fresh air in your neighborhood. It also gives a glimpse of what a relationship with Christ looks like... a life full of hope.

how to encourage your neighbor

“You look nice today!”

You remember where you were standing, the exact weather conditions, what kind of hairspray you used and where you bought the clothes you were wearing the last time someone complimented your appearance. Kind words linger. Here’s how to flatter a new friend (without being fake):

1. Prepare with prayer

Meditate on these verses and ask the Lord to give you an encouraging word for your neighbor:

- Pray for insight to her heart beyond what you see externally (1 Samuel 16:7)
- Pray for gentle, life-giving words (Proverbs 15:4)
- Pray for perfect timing (Proverbs 15:23)
- Pray that you will have godly words and the Lord’s leading (Isaiah 50:4)
- Pray for gracious words (Luke 4:22)
- Pray for gracious and attractive conversations that create curiosity about the Gospel (Colossians 4:6)
- Pray that your conversations will build up your neighbor (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Pray that you won’t say anything that is not good or helpful, and that your words will draw your neighbor closer to Christ (Ephesians 4:29)

2. Make it last

If you compliment someone’s clothing, the compliment fades as quickly as new denim. Instead, tell them how much you admire and appreciate a lasting character quality:

Friendly	Hard worker	Flexible	Hospitable	Conscientious
Dependable	Alert	Generous	Responsible	Attentive
Civic-minded	Creative	Supportive	Thoughtful	Diligent

3. Say something specific

Take a general complement to the next level by saying something specific you’ve noticed about them. *“Your flowers are so pretty! You’ve chosen such interesting color combinations and plants I’ve never seen before.”*

4. Emphasize their impact

Explain how this aspect of their personality impacts others. *“Your gardens brighten the entire neighborhood. Your hard work brings me joy every time I drive past your home.”*

5. Deliver with intent

Deliver your compliment in person when possible, or send a handwritten card as a lasting keepsake. You can even give them a public shout out on social media.

6. Don’t expect a response

Most people don’t know how to accept a compliment; they deny it, deflect it or downplay it. Even if your neighbor doesn’t know what to say to you, you can bet they will treasure the words you took the time to say to them

God has a soft spot for moms.

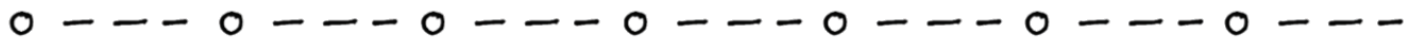
“He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.” Isaiah 40:11

When I struggle as a mom, this verse assures me that the Lord not only cares deeply for my daughter, but He is leading me as well.

10 ways to encourage a mom:

1. **Compliment her kids.** Kind words about our children will be pondered in her.
2. **Tell her she’s doing a good job.** Let her hear the words: “You are doing a good job.” If she’s like me, she rehearses her failures instead of her successes.
3. **Sympathize with her.** Try to imagine her frustration, her fears. Walk a mile in her sensible flats or cute wedge heels.
4. **Give her grace.** Next time her kids play too loud, too late, give her grace. When they ride their bike through your lawn, give her grace. When they block your parking spot, give them grace.
5. **Tell her about a time when parenting was hard for you.** Sometimes a story is all it takes to give her hope.
6. **Share her joy.** Celebrate her kid’s successes with her. Potty training? Honor roll? Give her a high five across the picket fence!
7. **Help her out.** Do her a special favor, like watch her kids in her front lawn while she does dishes (or do her dishes while she plays with the kids!).
8. **Give her kids a balloon.** No dietary restrictions or food allergies here! A simple balloon makes most kids smile.
9. **Give her a gift card.** Most moms invest more time and energy—not to mention money—on their families instead of themselves. Give her a little something just for her like a gift certificate or coupon for a local coffee shop, restaurant, movie theater, salon, or store.
10. **Pray with her.** Don’t just pray *for* her, pray *with* her. It’s not necessary to bow your heads or close your eyes, just talk to Jesus as if He’s standing with you. A sweet, simple prayer could go something like this, “Would it be alright if I prayed with you? Let’s just pray right now. Dear God, please bless this momma as she raises these beautiful kids. Give her wisdom and strength, love and grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Do you see what we didn’t do here? We didn’t offer any helpful advice, we didn’t tell her what she ought to be doing differently. We didn’t shame her, judge her or condemn her. We didn’t point out her problems (she’s well aware, trust me). Heck, we didn’t even invite her to church!



»»»» prayers & praises ««««

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WEEK 11

Share

CHAPTER 11 a word of warning & a message of hope

Next Best Steps

1. Have you ever felt like the devil was trying to get you down? What happened? How did you defend yourself? _____

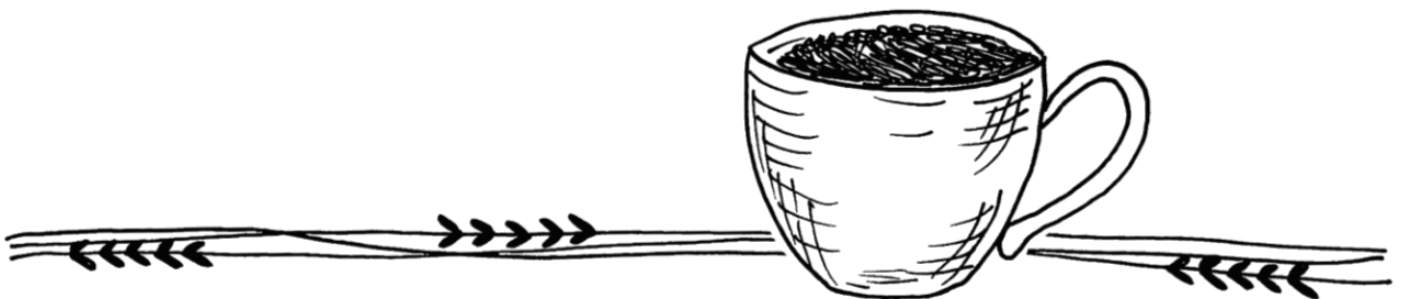
2. List the attacks of discouragement you've experienced as you've read this book. Could this be a spiritual attack? _____

3. How do your own personal actions impede your progress in your neighborhood? When has God disciplined you like a loving Father? List one change you can make to take responsibility and move forward. _____

4. Recall a trial that has brought you closer to God. What did you learn about Him? What did you learn about yourself? _____

5. Who in your neighborhood needs grace today? How will you extend it to them? _____

6. Write a statement of your initial excitement and later fear about loving your neighbor. Circle the subject of each sentence: Is it you? God? Your neighbor? _____



Why to share your faith with your neighbor

All this work. All of this effort to pray, meet, talk, hang out, welcome and encourage your neighbor. It's for a purpose. We show love to our neighbors because God commands it, no matter what their response. However, let's never forget the **first and greatest** commandment:

Jesus replied, "‘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.’ Matthew 22:37–39

We love our neighbors for the express purpose of seeing them someday love the Lord *their* God with all their hearts. The two commands are not mutually exclusive. **My love for God propels me into loving relationships with my neighbors, which propels them into a loving relationship with God.** God takes His command very seriously—

Rescue those who are unjustly sentenced to die; save them as they stagger to their death. Don't excuse yourself by saying, "Look, we didn't know." For God understands all hearts, and he sees you. He who guards your soul knows you knew. He will repay all people as their actions deserve. Proverbs 24:11-12

The stakes are high: Every single one of your neighbors will spend eternity in heaven or hell, whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not. The fears and insecurities we've talked about over the last several weeks are valid and fairly universal feelings; however, at some point, our desire for two things must be greater than our fear of sharing—

1. Our desire to be dead center in the middle of God's will as described in the two greatest commandments
2. Our desire to see our neighbors saved from an awful eternity apart from God

When my own desire for self-preservation and my own avoidance of risk trumped these two things, there was no way my neighbors were ever going to hear or experience God's love through me. With tearful prayers and trembling hands, I finally surrendered my desires and the true, unabashed joy of the Gospel took over. And, truly, it is such a wild, vivid, uninhibited love that possesses those who unclench their fists and declare, "Lord! Whatever it takes!" like Paul did—

When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:22-23

- Paul's humility: What do you think it means to "share their weakness" with our neighbors? How can you find common ground, even though we have different personal, political, and theological opinions?
- Paul's reality: How many of Paul's neighbors did he expect to respond to the Gospel? The reality is most of our neighbors will not respond to the gospel immediately, or even positively. "Success" is not the Gospel being **accepted** by all, it is the Gospel being **available** to all. And that, friends, is firmly within our control!

I'll leave you with one final motivation for sharing your faith, a beautiful Old Testament verse—

But be sure to fear the Lord and faithfully serve him. Think of all the wonderful things he has done for you. 1 Samuel 12:24.

Scripture gives us many motivations and instructions for sharing the Good News. But, at the end of the day, when we consider all He has done for us... how could we stay silent?

how to share your faith with your neighbor

Here's how to share your faith with your neighbors: simply start in Genesis and explain the entire Bible all the way through to Revelation (don't forget the minor prophets!), and sprinkle in a little church doctrine along the way. Easy peasy!

Well, I guess that does sound hard. So, what exactly is this Gospel we're supposed to share? Paul summarizes it nicely for us—

*This includes you who were **once** far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. **Yet now** he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. **As a result**, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. Colossians 1:21-22 emphasis added*

The Gospel is always about three things...

1. **Once**, we were far away from God because of our sin.
2. **Yet now**, Christ took the punishment for our sins on the cross.
3. **As a result**, we are near to God and blameless in His sight!

You can use this template to share your faith by telling your own personal story. There's nothing to memorize, because you wrote this story yourself. You lived every excruciating detail! When you tell your own story, sharing your faith becomes natural, practical, and interesting. The apostles shared their stories—

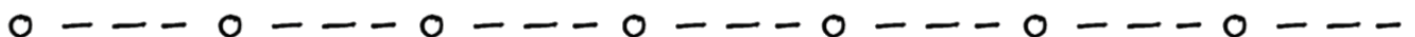
We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3

Your history is His story! Everything you have actually seen God do in your life—every word He has whispered in your ear, every trial He has walked you through, every time He's enabled you to forgive the unforgiveable and love the unlovable, every time He helped you hold your tongue and every fear He has soothed—every single experience and personal encounter you have had with God and His Son, Jesus Christ, is for the express purpose of helping you have fellowship (partnership, companionship) with the people He has carefully placed in your life. Your story is for God's glory.

You can adapt this 3-step method to share your entire life story (make a pot of coffee first), or just one episode—like that time you trusted God with your finances, when you overcame addiction, last week when you needed wisdom to parent your child, or the way you handled a nasty customer at work. Sharing our story happens over long conversations in crowded coffee shops, on park benches while children play underfoot and in living rooms after everyone has gone to bed. The Lord has commanded you to love your neighbor, and He has given you a story so you could do it well.

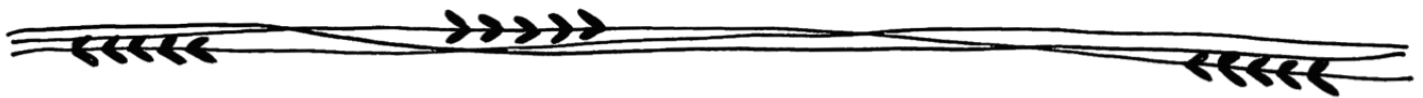


Paul's Story	Amy's Story	Your Story
Once, I was...		
Colossians 1:21 ...you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions.	Even though I was raised in church, I walked away from God for 20 years. I wanted to follow the crowd and make my own rules. Popularity and control were very important to me. Then my daughter nagged me to go to church, and I became friends with sweet, godly women at her school.	
Yet, now...		
²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body.	Through these relationships I realized that God loved me, He wanted the best for me, and I could trust His ways. Religion wasn't about rules any more, it was about relationships with God and other people. Now, I realize that my faith isn't just about going to church or saying the right prayers, it's about falling in love with the God who loved me first so much that He sent His Son to rescue me from all the evil, sin and death in the world.	
As a result...		
As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.	As a result, it's like I'm a new person! I don't even want to do the things I used to do. He's taught me how to love Him, how to be a better wife and mom, and even how to love my neighbors. The same way God raised Jesus from the dead, He raises me every day to live a life of love, joy and peace.	



- Find this pattern in Philippians 3:6-14. Talk about Paul’s humility in this passage. How will you weave this into your story?
- Find this pattern in Psalm 32. Talk about David’s desperation in this chapter. Can you be so vulnerable?
- Find this pattern in Acts 16:13-15. When the Lord opened Lydia’s heart, she opened her home. Is this your natural reaction?

You can use this method to share your entire life story (make a pot of coffee first), or just one episode—like that time you trusted God with your finances, when you overcame addiction, last week when you needed wisdom to parent your child, or the way you handled a nasty customer at work. Sharing our story happens over long conversations in crowded coffee shops, on park benches while children play underfoot and in living rooms after everyone has gone to bed. The Lord has commanded you to love your neighbor, and He wrote your story so you could do it well.



We’re praying for your neighbors all over the country, each one the recipient of inexplicable acts of kindness. One goes to bed smiling because someone complimented her son’s good manners. Another wonders if that neighbor who scraped ice off her windshield was God’s answer to her half-hearted plea for help this morning. Yet another can’t shake the sense of peace that settled over her when a neighbor—a stranger, really, but now more like a friend—whispered a prayer with her.

As if God was real.

As if He heard.

As if He cared.

When your natural friendships lead to spiritual conversations, you may have the privilege and honor of praying with your neighbor to receive Christ as her Savior. As complicated as this may seem, it’s really this simple—

“Dear God, I know I’ve been far from You because of the sin in my life. Yet, now, I believe that Jesus paid the price for my sin by dying on the cross in my place. As a result, I believe my sins are forgiven! I believe You rose from the dead and can resurrect all the dead areas of my life. Please walk with me each day until eternity. Amen!”

And now, your home in heaven will have the same next door neighbors as your home on earth.

»»»»» prayers & praises «««««

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