

Brandywine Valley Church
April 7, 2024
Pastor Terry Foester
GO: Love Your Neighbor
A Lifestyle of Love
Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37

Sometimes, it's helpful to understand what not to do before we can try to grasp how to do something right.

The **Upstairs Neighbors** portrays how we over complicate getting to know our neighbors. As we try to share Jesus, we become fixated on methods, losing sight of the importance of genuine relationship with our neighbors! And when they actually come to the door...we get awkward!

Today, we begin a three-week series called **GO: Love Your Neighbor**. It's meant to further equip you to reach your MY HASHTAG, and it will also lead us into GO Week, the last week of April - when we'll challenge you to do a Neighbors Social (More on that later).

We will read Jesus commentary on being a neighbor. The goal is to look at the biblical basis for being a good neighbor, and then to get practical on how to love our neighbors in our day.

We'll begin with Mark 12:28, which you can find on page 1005 if you're using the Bible in the setback.

A teacher of the law notices that, "Jesus had some good answers". So he approaches Jesus, and asks him a hum dinger of a question. "Of all the commandments, which is the greatest?" This guy, a teacher of the law in his own right, wanted to know the single most important thing to do. This is relatable. Have you ever just asked God – "God, just tell me what to do! What is it God, what is the one thing I need to know right now?"

The Greatest Commandment

Mark 12:28-34

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **30** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' **31** The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. **33** To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

A few observations about the text:

- (1) Jesus responds not with one great command, but with two. But he packages them as one. In Matthew's Gospel adds the detail that all the law and prophets hang on these two commands (Matt. 22:40).
- (2) Next, the command isn't really a command. It's a call to love. Have you ever tried to force love as a command? It typically doesn't go well. Jesus is saying, the greatest commandment to put into practice is to love. Let that sink in.
- (3) Then Jesus makes a connection, most believe it's the first time these two commands have been combined into one thought or package. He quotes two passages from the Jewish Law – Deuteronomy 6:4-5 & Leviticus 19:18.

- (4) There is a foundational creed of Jewish life and thought: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One". This is the Sh'ma, named after the Hebrew verb "to hear". The Sh'ma was cited daily.
- (5) Jesus is adding to their daily prayer!

What is Jesus saying?

By adding to their daily pray – he's saying this is central. Loving neighbor is like loving God. And by quoting the law or torah, he's essentially saying - "this was always the plan."

There is a flow to this love.
Love God. Love Neighbor.

Love God with all your heart, should, mind, strength – It's a picture that our love for God is personal and comprehensive. Love of God includes all the nooks and crannies of our inner and outer life. Our will, our thinking, our action, our emotion, our soul. Your spouse can't love God for you. Your mom or dad can't love God on your behalf, except for maybe when you are a very young child, they hold you in his love.

Let your love for God encompass your entire being. Heart, mind, soul, & strength. All of who you are.

I want to urge your now...be open to God's love! It's something that calls for a response. **Start every endeavor, every activity or action...with love for God—with your entire being, encompassing your emotions, your will, your knowledge, and all your actions.**

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He adds to his personal love for God, by saying the seconds like it – **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

QUESTION #1

Do you connect love of God and neighbor as Jesus does?

As I reflect on my own life, and even some of my church activities – I'm caught by how much of my attention and time is focused on loving God, and how naturally I separate that from the activity of loving my neighbor. So much so, that I can live for years without know all my neighbors names.

We are no longer free to disconnect love of God from love of neighbor.

Reflect on your own life: Is the order of love evident in your life? Are things in the right order? Do your actions reflect right-ordered love? Love of God flowing to Love of neighbor?

How do we live this out?

As it plays out in the Gospel, even when Jesus answers life's biggest question, those around him have follow-up questions.

There's an encounter in Luke's Gospel, when an expert in the law asks Jesus another question. He recites Jesus summary to love God and love neighbor, but he has a follow-up question that gets to motivation.

He asks, well, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answers with a story.

This is an image titled, *The Good Samaritan* by Vincent van Gogh. Jesus uses this occasion to respond to the process of neighboring with a story. And the story teaches us so much about our own motivations.

Turn forward to The Gospel of Luke, chapter 10. Page 1027 in the setback Bible.

Luke 10:

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus concludes the story by turning the question back to the expert in the law... **'Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'**

By the end of the response, Jesus turns the question back around on the guy asking. Wow! Jesus turns it around completely. He says, "There is a better question than 'Who is my neighbor?'"

Here's the better question: "Of the three, who proved to be a neighbor?"

Jesus is saying, don't get caught up in who your neighbor is or isn't.

Instead, ask yourself this: Have you proven to be a neighbor?

I find this just plain difficult, inconvenient and it has all the appearances of ruining my day. I am the priest who passes by on the other side. I am the Levite who passes by on the other side. Today, Lord, help me be the Samaritan who looks upon my neighbor and has compassion. Who proves to be a neighbor, ready to step forward into the inconvenience and unknown of the moment.

Instead of fixating on identifying is or isn't our neighbor, we should ask ourselves: Have we proven to be a neighbor to anyone!?

So, think about your life: Who have you proven to be a neighbor to?

It's not a comfortable question is it. But be gracious to yourself for a moment.

QUESTION #2

Will you prove to be a neighbor?

Perhaps it's someone close to you, like a spouse or a friend in need. Or maybe it's a stranger, someone you encounter in your daily life.

Let's get practical: What are the barriers?

- **Apathy, or lack of love.**
- **Literal barriers, like fence lines & what's socially acceptable**
- **Lack of time**

- **It's overwhelming** – if anyone can be my neighbor does that mean everyone is my neighbor?

- **It's inconvenient**

How do we move beyond the barrier?

Prompting from the Holy Spirit: requires a connection to the love of God

The outlook is not bleak...there's a lot of good neighboring already happening in our midst. The Broken Beginnings Ministry goes into Wilmington, under I-95 for church under the bridge - they provide food and hygiene items to their neighbors. Another group goes monthly to provide chapel at Sunday Breakfast Mission shelter. Another group provides a monthly lunch to the Urban Promise Academy. We have a team that works with Foster Well meeting practical needs of foster families in our area. Grief Share, ESL, Financial Peace, a team mobilizing to care for those with special needs in our church community, we have a care team that provides wrap around help to families settling as refugees in our area. I'm probably leaving out some special focus ministry.

I say all this, not to brag on us...but to recognize that God is on the move. Despite the challenges, there's already a lot of good neighboring happening around us—**we have a home-church picture of the power of love in action.**

There's more neighboring to do. I want to challenge you in the neighboring that happens in your every day life, where you live work and play. That's where you have an opportunity **to consistently** live as a good neighbor.

We want a set of rules that we can keep, so we can earn eternal life. Jesus responds with a path to follow. It's more of a way of life than a rule to follow. **Love God completely, and love your neighbor as if you're caring for your own self.**

**Love is risky. To love neighbor is to take a risk!
We have a collective risk we're going to take together, as a church.**

On Saturday, April 27, we invite you to plan and host an informal **Neighbors Social** where you live.

Our GO Week 2024 focus is the Neighbors Social. This year we are focusing on our own local neighbors and building relationships.

WHAT: Invite your neighbors to an informal get together, a time to get to know each other.

Offer a few snacks and drinks, but remember, the main goal is simply to get to know your neighbors. A gathering can be as simple as a cup of coffee or as grand as a BBQ or block party. It's about creating connections where there were none or very little.

WHEN: Saturday, April 27. We are encouraging two versions of the Neighbors Social:

- Morning: A two-hour morning social that includes coffee and pastries.
- Afternoon/early evening: Two-hour late afternoon social that includes drinks and snacks.

Select the time you think works best in your neighbors.

WHERE: The location can vary depending on your setting. Pick a place people will feel comfortable: your driveway, front yard, a common room, parking lot, neighborhood park, etc. Select a location that feels inviting and natural.

Your setting may be a retirement community, an apartment complex, an urban block, a home on a busy street or a suburban neighborhood. Regardless of your neighborhood make-up, this event can be modified as needed for your setting.

WHY: The purpose of the Neighbors Social is simple: Building relationships with your neighbors

Recognizing that relationships can be barriers, our goal of this event is to know our neighbors' names, get a snapshot of their lives, and foster fellowship. As local co-missionaries, we need to become comfortable trying different approaches to reach our neighbors. This is a risk. Results may vary.

HOW: Grab a NEIGHBORS SOCIAL KIT! (One per household)

See photo.

Door hangers, stickers, magnets, directions...we even put the sharpie in there for you – this won't be easy but we want to remove the barriers. We want to hold you accountable, helping you step out of your comfort zone.

(Honestly I'm not sure how this is going to go - my human side wonders if it will be a complete flop. But with God, it's possible. Even as my kids were helping me build these little kits – each one asked, "Are people going to actually do this?")

The idea sits at the heart of Jesus's teaching.

We're not going to get overly fixated on methods, the hope here is that we take the steps necessary to reach out to our neighbors with hospitality...and allow our love of God to overflow in relationship, as we love our neighbors.

To love deeply, to host someone, is to open yourself to vulnerability, and possible rejection.

Communion

As we approach the communication table: Remember, Jesus himself was our ultimate neighbor, demonstrating a love for all that had no limits or boundaries.

Jesus was driven by love. His love for Father, and his love for neighbor. As you take part in this communion today...allow a deeper connection and love for God to develop...that then moves you to love like Jesus loved as a neighbor.

Romans 5:6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But **God demonstrates his own love for us in this:** While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

As we partake in communion today, let's reflect on Jesus's example and commit to being neighbors to those around us, embodying his love in our words and deeds.

Let us pray.

1 Cor. 11:23-26

The Bread

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

The Cup

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.