

1 Vision Area

1 Neighbor

The Big Picture

We want to begin to develop a Biblical idea of those who are our neighbors and start thinking about how to develop relationships with them.

Biblical Text

Luke 10.25-37 (NIV)

Materials Needed

Index Cards, *if used*

Preparing for the Lesson

When I began to think about the goal of this lesson, identifying our neighbor was one of my first objectives. This was especially important on the heels of seeing “ministry” perhaps in a broader sense than we have traditionally defined it in the past. As I thought more about it, it occurred to me that scripture had already answered the question: “Who is my neighbor?” so logically it was here that I turned.

We will begin two weeks of focusing on the importance of developing a relationship with our neighbors by first defining who our neighbor is. In this, we will not only spend time using scripture to answer the question, but will also attempt to think about “real” people we know who are our neighbors.

Next week, we will continue this line of thinking, but will focus more on “how” we develop these important relationships with one neighbor.

Spend a few minutes reading the text for today’s lesson prior to your group. Although the story is very familiar to many of us—you may even choose to have your children tell the story this week—read it with a critical eye in attempt to hear it fresh.

Let me give you a couple of things to think about when you read this story. The first is that when Jesus tells a parable, there is often a “shocking” moment within them, something that is completely unexpected. In our story, the thing that is so shocking is that a Samaritan would be helping a Jew. (Jews and Samaritans did not get along, nor did they associate with one another. Think Longhorns and Aggies multiplied about 100 times. OK, it was actually a lot worse!) In fact, the people you would have expected to help (a priest and a Levite) do not; the one person you would think would not is the one who actually does.

This leads to the second point, which is our neighbors are going to be people to whom we can show mercy, rather than the person who lives geographically closest or even the family whom we think may fit best within our group. This may

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Preparing for the Lesson (cont.)

be different than how you thought of a neighbor going into this lesson, but you notice that even Jesus reverses this story mid-stream. The expert in the law wants to know what laws he must do to inherit eternal life and Jesus tells him to love his neighbor. The man then wants to know who is his neighbor, and Jesus tells him a story of a man who *was* a neighbor because he showed someone mercy. The idea, it would appear, is that to love your neighbor, one must be a neighbor. This echoes our focus of the last couple of weeks in ministry. Instead of finding someone who is a neighbor so that we can do something to/for them (love them, Jesus says, but it would appear that the expert was looking for something a little more tangible); we instead show them mercy, which involves relationship building and most likely doing things that go out of our way.

By the way, do not let our text today force you into thinking that the only people you can show mercy to are people who are (figuratively) left for dead on the side of the road of life. These people *may* be people we need to show mercy, but the point of Jesus' story was that neighbors show mercy, wherever that mercy is needed.

Our overarching challenge is to develop relationships with a neighbor within the context of our groups. We at South Plains have narrowed the focus somewhat by defining a neighbor as someone who is non-churched or nominally-churched. We are looking to develop relationships with people who are not involved in a community of faith versus drawing in people at South Plains who simply do not have a group yet. (These people need to be in a group and your group may be the very one they need, don't get me wrong, but that is not the focus of 1 Neighbor.)

It has been my experience that true loving of our neighbors is an uncomfortable task. Neighbors tend to ask the wrong questions or say inappropriate things. Neighbors tend to not know the "rules" and therefore create awkward moments we must somehow deal with at the most inopportune times. Neighbors have baggage and baggage must somehow be dealt with. Neighbors will disrupt the dynamic of your group. I say all of this not to discourage you, but to prepare and commend you. Prepare you for a challenge that will most likely stretch you, but commend you because, according to Jesus, it is through loving your neighbor that you inherit eternal life.

Possible Lesson Outline

A good ice breaker question for today might be: *Describe the best neighbor you have ever had.* This gets us thinking about the concept of "neighbor," but also starts us quantifying what a good neighbor looks like.

I would encourage you to have the children tell the story of the Good Samaritan. Be prepared to add details, if necessary. You could also have one of the children read the story. Be sure to include them when you begin to ask questions about the story by addressing some of your questions specifically toward them.

Spend some time in discussion based on the text using the discussion questions below.

After the discussion time, spend a few minutes sharing with one another possible "neighbors" with whom your group could begin to develop a relationship. NOTE: *Next week we will look into more specific ways to go about developing relationships with our neighbors. You may want to begin that conversation this week, but do not feel like you need to develop a strategy for this to happen this week.*

You may want to use index cards and have people write down "neighbors" that they feel like the group can show mercy to. If so, be sure to spend some time in prayer for these people and that God would open doors for relationships to begin.

Close the group time in prayer.

Lesson Activities

Won't You be My Neighbor?

To help us think about individuals the group might begin to develop relationships with, have group members write down people on an index card with whom the group may be able to show mercy. This might include specific names (John Doe) or maybe a group of people (Teachers at Smith Elementary). Spend the week in prayer about the people God may be opening doors for you to develop relationships with. Next week we will continue to visit about these names.

For the Kids

Because this story is so familiar to us and to our children, I would encourage you to include your children (even your young children) to be a part of the group discussion time. I say this for a couple of reasons. First, if you allow your children to tell this story, they have ownership in what your group does and feel like an important part of what goes on. This is important for the second reason, which is, if your children see you talking about and planning on developing relationships with neighbors, they will do the same. Your children probably have better beginnings of relationships with neighbors than you do, and so they already are doing the very thing you are working on for yourself.

For Next Week

Be praying about any names you have already begun to identify as people with whom you as a group can be building a relationship. Continue to add names to this list as you think about it this week.

Prayer Ideas

If you include any list making of potential neighbors, be sure to also pray for the members of your group who will be involved in developing a relationship with these people. The idea of this comes from the first part of Luke chapter 10 where Jesus tells his disciples to pray for the workers who will go out into the field. We often hear of groups praying for individuals to hear the gospel, but the example Jesus gives ironically is to pray for those who will go harvest.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think the expert of the law defined “love the Lord your God” and “love your neighbor” (v. 27)? How does Jesus define it? How do you define it?
2. In what ways do we try to justify ourselves (v. 29)?
3. Often when Jesus tells a parable, there is some element that is “shocking,” that is, something that is unexpected or contrary to the norm. What is the shocking element of this story? Why is it so shocking? How does this element help us understand Jesus’ point better?
4. If you were to rewrite this parable in today’s language and using examples from today, who would the main characters be? What would be the main event (instead of beaten and left for dead, it would be...)?
5. What do you think of when you think of a “neighbor?” What does the Samaritan do that makes him a neighbor? How do we show mercy to those around us?
6. Given what we have said about ministry in Ephesians 4, in what ways do the idea of “ministry” and “neighbor” overlap?

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Discussion Questions (cont.)

7. What are some ways we can reach out and develop relationships with our neighbors?

What's Next

We want to begin to develop relationships with those who are our neighbors, starting with a few simple verses found in Acts 8.