

## 1 Vision Area

1 Neighbor

## The Big Picture

Last week we asked the question: Who is our neighbor? In some ways, that may be an ongoing question we continue to wrestle with, but I want us to consider the next logical question: Who is our neighbor that we share the story of God with? Scripture gives us an example as to how the early church found and shared with their neighbors.

## Biblical Text

Acts 8.1-4 (NIV)

## Preparing for the Lesson

*NOTE: Since this week is the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving, your group may choose to spend time celebrating together and sharing those reasons for which you are thankful. This is a great opportunity to build deeper the relationship you have with group members. In other words, you may skip this lesson altogether this week and I am perfectly happy with you doing so.*

It always surprises me the number of times the early church is told to evangelize people in the book of Acts. Here, in the book that records perhaps the greatest time period of growth in church history, the church is never explicitly told to go share their faith. That's right, in the midst of an evangelistic fervor, it is never actually brought up, it is just done. That seems opposite of how we do it, or at least how we would plan it.

What we do discover when we look at the book of Acts is a simple principle best illustrated by the passage for today: the church told the story of God (preached) wherever they went. I think the principle is the same for relationships with have with our neighbors. We are reaching out to our neighbors best when we are sharing with them the story of God as we interact with them in our day-to-day lives.

Remember from our study last week that neighbors are people we are able to show mercy to and those people may actually be people we would not normally consider our "neighbor." In other words, the sweet family that lives two houses down who have children the same age as ours and share similar interests may not be as much as a neighbor as the single woman working two jobs to feed her kids that waits on us every morning at the coffee shop.

Last week I asked you to consider who are those people to whom you could show mercy, that is, who are your neighbors. Spend some time during this week's discussion identifying those people collectively as a group; paying special attention to those individuals you can be neighborly to as a group. How many of these people do you already have a relationship with? How many of the people on this list are individuals you already preach to as you go about your day?

This principle relates to what we have already talked about when we described the idea of ministry. We at times sign up for "service projects," but there are never any ongoing relationships developed through the process. The same is true for reaching out to our neighbors. What better place to begin than with those individuals we already have ongoing relationships with?

## Preparing for the Lesson

I guess if I were to summarize the lesson in a sentence or two, I would do it like this. Share the story of Jesus with those individuals who are already your neighbor, the people you see on a regular basis. Rather than coming up with a big project or outreach event, pick someone you see daily and share with them God's story.

## Possible Lesson Outline

A possible ice-breaker question might be "How easy do you find it to share your faith with people you are closest to?" Another could be: Have you ever found a product/band/movie that you could not help but share with others how good it was or how well it worked?

If you asked your group to come up with a list of possible neighbors, spend some time discussing the list. Our questions today may change the emphasis of the list, but at least let people share who they thought of when they thought of their neighbors.

Spend some time in conversation using the discussion questions.

If you started with a list of neighbors, spend a few minutes asking how the discussion alters or changes the perspective of those individuals you listed. I hope that today's discussion brings the focus a little closer to home or to those individuals we come in contact with on a day-to-day basis.

Close with a time of thanksgiving prayer, sharing with one another those things for which you are thankful.

## Lesson Activities

While there is not a specific activity for today's lesson, I think it would be a good idea as you discuss the neighbors with whom you want to share the story of God to spend some time discussing specific ways to go about doing that. Yes, we want to reach out to those we come in regular contact with, but what specific things are we thinking we will do? Invite them to group? Purchase them a copy of *The Story*? Finding the "right" answer is not as crucial, I think, as at least having something that motivates us to follow through.

You as the leader will be crucial to this. Ask people to continue to flesh out their ideas. (What ways do you think you can share the story with the person in the cubicle next to you? Can any of us also help encourage your neighbor to be a part of this group? These kinds of questions help sharpen our focus on some sort of action.) If the group comes up with a plan for the entire group, be sure to review your plan of action, including who will do what to make it happen.

## Prayer Ideas

Because the holiday season reminds us to be thankful, I would open your prayer time with a prayer and then allow people to conversationally share the things for which they are thankful. Close your time with another prayer.

## Discussion Questions

1. Our text today begins with an ominous tone: killings being approved of and people scattering in fear. How do you think you would have reacted if you were a part of this church at this time?
2. How difficult do you think Paul's going from house to house made life for the early church?
3. What sort of affect do you think this climate would have on the spread of the gospel? What affect DID it have?

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**Discussion Questions (cont.)**

4. Acts 1.8 gives a sort of blueprint for how the gospel would be spread. If you were giving this plan, how do you think you would have gone about implementing it?
5. How much do you “preach” wherever you go? How much should you? What can you do to “preach” more?
6. The gospel spread because those who were scattered preached to their neighbors—whoever their neighbors happened to be. Where do you find neighbors in your life?
7. How can you do a better job building relationships with those neighbors so as to be able to preach? How can you do a better job preaching to your neighbors so as to be able to build relationships with them?

**What's Next**

Next week will have a break for the Thanksgiving holiday, then the following week we will begin to look at the idea of 1<sup>st</sup> Fruits.