

STUDY GUIDE FALL 2019

#### INTRODUCTION

Jesus was once asked by a critic to name the most important commandment in the Bible. This was a trick question, intended to put Jesus in a difficult position, because Jewish tradition stated there were 613 commandments in the Old Testament. How could Jesus possibly identify the one that was most important? But Jesus confidently responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."

However, Jesus didn't stop there. He immediately voiced the second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus went on to say that all of the Bible's commandments are driven by these top two: Love God and Love People.

Every year at Christ Community Church, our ministries set goals for the new ministry season. The Next Generation ministry leaders craft goals they plan to pursue, as do the leaders of Creative Arts, International and Community Impact, Community Groups, Care, our regional campuses, and so on. Then, the staff Executive Team selects one goal (occasionally two or three) for all of our ministries to pursue collectively. We call this the Biggie Goal for the year.

We have chosen the second greatest commandment, Love Your Neighbor, as our Biggie Goal for the 2019-2020 ministry season. So, as a church, we will be hearing a lot about this objective in coming months. Pastor Jim will launch a 4-week sermon series to promote our Biggie Goal on Vision Weekend, September 7 & 8, and hundreds of our Community Groups will be tracking with this series by following the study guide that you now hold in your hand (or on your mobile device).

Each week, the study guide will provide: a sermon recap; sermon-based discussion questions for Community Groups (and families); an excerpt from the book The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality As a Way of Life (which you can purchase at one of our Re•source bookstores) or The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door; and a Love Your Neighbor Challenge that will help you put the week's theme into practice.

The four themes of this series form the practical steps of how to love our neighbors: meet, host, invite, and serve. There is a fifth theme that ties all of these practical steps together and makes them effective: pray. Imagine what might happen if thousands of people who attend Christ Community Church pursued this year's Biggie Goal whole-heartedly and set out to love their neighbors just as they themselves have been loved by God!

#### SERMON RECAP

- 1. A Purpose for Proximity (Matthew 22:35-40; Leviticus 19:18, 34)
- 2. A Plan for Encountering (John 1:14)
- 3. A Passion for Knowing (Psalm 139:1-4)

# SERMON-BASED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Why did you choose your current home as a place to live?
- 2. Why do you think God put you in your neighborhood or apartment complex?
- 3. Make a list of reasons as to why it's important to love your neighbors.
- 4. In what ways is Jesus' incarnation (i.e. coming to earth and becoming one of us) a role model for us in loving our neighbors?
- 5. Why is meeting your neighbors a necessary first step in loving them? Don't overthink this one. How well do you currently know your neighbors? What have been the biggest obstacles to getting to know them?
- 6. What are some practical steps you could take to meet the neighbors you don't yet know and become better acquainted with the neighbors you already know?
- 7. Why do you think people love the sound of their own name?
- 8. Describe everything you know about 3 of your neighbors.
- 9. How could you develop a greater passion to know your neighbors better?

# **EXCERPT FROM** THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD (pp. 97-99, emphasis added)

This may come as a news flash, but your neighbors don't live in your house. So if you never leave your humble abode, you'll never **meet** any of your neighbors. They are not going to bust up in your living room and introduce themselves, and if they do you should call the cops ASAP.

This means you need to go outside. Often. Daily. Consistently. As much as you can. Because that's pretty much the only place you are going to **meet** people who live close to you.

Going on walks is a brilliant way to **meet** those in your neighborhood, and it also gives you the added benefit of exercise. If you have a dog or kids, that's another benefit, because people are often more interested in **meeting** your pet or children than they are in you. Get out that leash or stroller and get moving, and as you see people you don't know, practice the Always Rule rather than the Sometimes Rule. As you walk, pray for the people you **meet**, the neighbors you already know, and even the people you don't yet know.

If you have a park, playground, or pool near your neighborhood, this is a no-brainer place for you to frequent, because it's where other neighbors gather. For us these environments have been a fruitful place to **meet** and build relationships with neighbors.

Another thing that helped me (Dustin) was moving our grill from the back of our house to the front. Though it seems redneck (I didn't say I put a weight bench out front), this switch has been an incredible opportunity to **meet** neighbors. People see me grilling in my front yard and it's almost as though they can't not come to talk to me—they're either drawn by the incredible smell or they just have to **meet** this weirdo who is grilling on his front lawn. Either way, it works...

Unfortunately most of us live in a society of isolation where garage doors or doormen act as a moat around our personal fortress. Once the "gate" is closed, there is no getting in. This sounds a bit creepy, but I (Dustin) tried for a long time to meet one of our neighbors, Lee, and was unsuccessful. I finally figured out when he took out his trash every week and "by chance" I began taking out my trash at the same time.

"Hey, Lee, funny seeing you here," I said. It took time, but the conversations on our trash runs moved from greeting each other across the street to hanging out in the street catching up on the week. Even through something as simple as taking out the trash, we can get creative with our intentionality.

#### LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR CHALLENGE: CANNING HUNGER

Choose how many homes on your block you'd like to cover (i.e. neighbors you'd like to meet): 10-20 is ideal.

Drop an info card and bag (provided by Christ Community Church) at each door announcing when you'll be coming by in the next week to collect canned goods and non-perishables for the local food pantry. Specify the date and time for your pick-up. Give whatever details might make your appeal more winsome or compelling. (For example: "I'll be pulling my little red wagon," "I look forward to meeting you," or "The local food pantry serves [#] people every week.")

When you pick up the canned goods, start with a simple introduction if you don't already know them. Tell them your name, which house or apartment is yours, and a little about your family or job. Offer a simple apology if you've never met them before: "I can't believe I've lived on this block for three years and I've never met you." Offer to get their email address as an easy way to update them on how much food you collect.

Record all the information you glean about each neighbor before you forget it.

If your neighbors requested, send them a follow up "Way to go!" email. Tell them how many pounds of food you collected (estimate one pound per item—some will weigh less, some more), how much you enjoyed getting to know everyone, how thankful the food pantry was for the donation, etc.

Post a block chart on your refrigerator with the homes and names of your neighbors as a reminder to pray for them and continue to find ways to connect. For a free printable block map, go to artofneighboring.com, and look for the "block map" under the "resources" tab.

WEEK 1: NOTES

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#### SERMON RECAP

- 1. Hospitality's Home (Luke 5:27-30)
- 2. Hospitality's Occasion
- 3. Hospitality's Guest List
- 4. Hospitality's Goal (Luke 5:31)

# SERMON-BASED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Is hospitality something that comes naturally to you? Why or why not?
- 2. In which of the following ways have you viewed your home: A place for refuge, entertainment, family, improvement, etc? (Note: There is nothing wrong with any of these perspectives—in moderation.)
- 3. How has God shown hospitality to us? What can we learn from his example?
- 4. What are the dangers of making hospitality into a big production (i.e. spotless house, spectacular dinner, etc.)? What are some guidelines for practicing hospitality in a healthy way?
- 5. What occasions would be a natural fit for you to invite neighbors over? Why?
- 6. 1 Corinthians 1:26-30 describes the condition we were in when God welcomed us into his family. What can you learn from this passage about the sorts of neighbors who might be prime candidates for your hospitality?
- 7. The ultimate goal of Christian hospitality is to introduce others to Jesus. What are the dangers of pursuing this goal in a heavy-handed fashion? What are the dangers of forgetting about this goal as you practice hospitality?

# **EXCERPT FROM THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD** (pp.18, 56, emphasis added)

There's work you, there's hobby you, there's friend you, and then there's home you. And you'd love for the world to understand that they shouldn't mess with home you.

**Your home**, as much as possible, has morphed into exactly what you think it should be: a refuge from the rat race called life, which you never realized would be so crazy. A retreat, a place to zone out and unplug. After all, don't you deserve that? Don't you deserve a little mind-numbing television marathon and vegging after this Tuesday? It's just what the doctor ordered (assuming you are the doctor, of course).

Before you know it, years pass. The fortress you called **your home**, your personal refuge, hasn't seen a friend walk in, much less a neighbor or a stranger, in you can't remember when. Sure, occasionally you open **your home** to others when you host events like the Thanksgiving get-together... But those times are more the exception than the rule.

You aren't alone. Many Christians have bought into the cultural view that **our homes** are our personal and private fortresses.... We have observed that the way a typical Christian thinks about **their home** isn't all that different from how a typical non-Christian thinks: It's the place I eat, sleep, relax, and entertain myself—by myself....

Throughout history our ways of living have adapted and changed, and there seems to be a growing realization that maybe some of those changes aren't for the best, that maybe in our overvalue of isolation and entertainment, we've actually missed out on something essential and worthwhile—deep relationships with others.

**Hospitality** steps into this desire for depth of relationship and offers a beautiful invitation. To those so caught up in the hectic pace of life that they may not even fully realize that they miss the village, **hospitality** puts on display a treasure that something deeply embedded in our souls can't help but notice. When we are included, invited, cared for, recognized, and enfolded into the warmth of relationships, something in our psyches knows that this is the type of connection we were designed for. This inner knowledge reflects the statement God made over Adam in Genesis 2:18, that it is not good for man to be alone.

In a culture where busyness is prized, where isolation is rampant, and where "blinking devices" replace genuine relationships, **hospitality** offers a beautiful and countercultural rebellion.

#### LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR CHALLENGE: PRAYER WALK

Prayer walk your home. Go from room to room, praying out loud for God's blessing on the activities taking place in each room. Pray especially that neighbors would feel welcome in your home.

Pick an occasion (i.e. a special reason) to invite neighbors over in the next month. Put it on your calendar.

Choose which neighbors to invite (not too few, not too many, with or without kids?). Invite these neighbors at least two weeks in advance of the occasion.

Plan something interactive for the gathering—like an ice-breaker question that everyone can answer: Where did you live before this neighborhood? What do you like best about living here? etc. (Note: There are phone apps with ice-breaker questions, or you can pick up a copy of Gary Poole's *The Complete Book of Questions* at our Re•source bookstore.)

WEEK 2: NOTES

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# WEEK 3: INVITE SEPTEMBER 21-27

#### SERMON RECAP

- 1. What Is the Great Banquet? (Luke 14:15, 16)
- 2. Who Are the Inviters? (Luke 14:17)
- 3. How Will Many Respond to Our Invitation? (Luke 14:18-20)
- 4. Why Should We Keep on Inviting? (Luke 14:21-24)

# SERMON-BASED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. If you could be given four free tickets to your favorite event, what would the event be and who would you invite with the other three tickets?
- 2. Why does God use the imagery of a great banquet to picture life in his eternal kingdom? What aspects of that future kingdom do you find most appealing? (See Isaiah 25:6-9 and Revelation 21:1-5)
- 3. Why would God choose you to invite others to the great banquet? What benefits would you gain from doing this? What do you find difficult about being an inviter?
- 4. Many people turn down God's invitation to the great banquet. What are some of the reasons they don't surrender to Jesus and thereby enter God's kingdom? Consider the reasons given in Jesus' parable—looking over a land purchase, trying out new oxen, staying home with their wife—and see if you can come up with parallel contemporary excuses.
- 5. What are some of the motivations—hinted at in Jesus' parable—for being an inviter? Which of these do you personally find most compelling?
- 6. What kinds of people are most likely to respond positively to your sharing about Jesus? Who are some of those people in your life?

# EXCERPT FROM THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD (pp.131)

You might imagine a yearlong relationship with a friend of neighbor like one big, ongoing conversation. Each time you meet, pick up where you left off. This means you need to remember essential points in the conversation.

This may seem weird to you, but embrace it. We have a friend who uses the notes app on his phone to keep records of his conversations with neighbors. It helps him pray for them specifically as well as allows him to look back at the notes when he knows he's likely to see them again. If they speak of pain, then you have a built-in chance to say, "Hey, I'd love to hear how things are going with that situation you mentioned last night. I prayed this morning that God would provide for your needs."

If you are like us, you are also likely to think of things you wished you had said once the night was over. You remember a great story or think of an inroad to the gospel that you missed. Well, guess what? You've got another chance. Since the person is still in your life, you can simply spin back into the conversation: "You know, after you left last night, I had another thought about that thing you mentioned..." Just like that, you are right back in the flow of the conversation and you can keep it going time and time again.

There's no one right way to speak about Jesus. The important thing is that you take advantage of any opportunity biblical hospitality presents. Thankfully, God will take your feeble efforts, multiply them, and bring far greater results than we can ask or imagine.

#### LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR CHALLENGE: INVITATIONS

Try inviting a neighbor or friend to Christ Community's next Inspiring Stories weekend, October 5-6, with special guest Kay Warren. More info about this event is available online at ccclife.org/inspiring. Pick up invite cards at your campus or download images to share on social media at ccclife.org/inspiring.

Pray every day this week for this person before extending the invitation.

Carefully plan what you will say: Why might they enjoy this event? What is special about Kay's story that could interest them? Would you like to grab a bite to eat after the event? Go for it!

WEEK 3: NOTES

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#### SERMON RECAP

- 1. What if neighbors noticed? (Luke 10:31-33a)
- 2. What if neighbors cared? (Luke 10:33b, 36-37)
- 3. What if neighbors sacrificed? (Luke 10:34-35)

## SERMON-BASED DISCUSSION OUESTIONS

- 1. Share a time when you had a neighbor help you with something. How did it make you feel? If that hasn't happened, how do you feel about that?
- 2. What barriers are in the way of knowing your neighbors' needs? What could you do to find out what needs your neighbors have?
- 3. What would help you grow in compassion for your neighbors?
- 4. Reflect on the past six months in your neighborhood. Where might there have been opportunities to serve your neighbors that you missed?
- 5. Who could be allies in your neighborhood who could team up if one of your neighbors had a bigger need?
- 6. How could you reverse the direction of service and ask your neighbors for help?

## EXCERPT FROM THE ART OF NEIGHBORING

Anyone can be a good neighbor.... A few years ago, Nicole's family made a commitment to reach out to their neighbors across the street. That family consisted of a recently divorced mom and seven foster kids. To say that their life was chaotic would be a massive understatement. As they began to engage this family and learn about the complexity of their household, it began to feel overwhelming. Nicole noticed that two of their elementaryage kids were struggling. She mentioned to her mom that she would be willing to help them with their schoolwork a couple of times a week.

Nicole began tutoring these two kids. She knew she had something to offer, so she simply showed up at their house on Tuesdays and Thursdays to help. Not only is she serving these kids in significant ways, she is also

serving their mom, who has expressed how grateful she is for the role Nicole is playing in the lives of her kids. This is a beautiful reminder of the power of neighboring. If an eleven-year-old child can figure out a way to match up her gifts with the needs of her neighbors, then so can you!

In our culture, we have a fascination with celebrities and talent. We are riveted by movies about extraordinary people doing extraordinary things because we want to be inspired and wowed by the lives of others.

So imagine watching a movie about a man who goes to work every day, has dinner with his family five nights a week, and reads books to his kids before they go to bed at night. He also is a great neighbor. He makes time to invite his neighbors over for a meal a few times a month. Instead of watching football games by himself, he watches them with the people who live around him. He lets his neighbors borrow his tools and helps them work on their cars. Occasionally he grabs a drink with a few of his neighbors and they talk about their jobs and what they think their kids will grow up to be. When one of his neighbors is going through a hard time, he's available. When a neighbor needs him to watch her kids because something unexpected comes up, he is always willing. Imagine in scene after scene of this film, we watch a man who is consistently faithful to love those who live nearest to him. This would be a terribly boring movie. No one would pay to see it.

The movies we watch tell us a lot about what we value in our culture. We don't value consistency. On the whole, we are convinced that we need to make a big splash to make a difference, just being a good neighbor isn't that big a deal.

But Jesus says being a good neighbor is exactly the kind of life that can change the world. This simple truth can change everything: small things matter. They really do.

It doesn't take a superhero to be a great neighbor.... When it comes to neighboring, it's important to figure out how we can make a difference in the lives of our neighbors. It may not seem that we have much, but when we give from what we have, something sacred happens. God uses the small things that we bring to him and multiplies them into a miracle in someone else's life.

# LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR CHALLENGE: BRAINSTORM WAYS TO SERVE

Set a timer for 10 minutes. Until the timer runs out, brainstorm a list of as many acts of kindness and service as you can think of. They can be big or small. Also list any resources or skills you have that might be helpful to someone else. Pick a simple act from your list and do it for a neighbor this week.

WEEK 4: NOTES

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