

Loving Your Neighbor – Lk 10:25-37

I too am looking forward to this month, and our Connect Outreach Conference . . .

But before I get started, I want to give you a few more details on our build-out and capital campaign; You can see in the bulletin that we're still short of our goal . . .

But with the bids that came in, and the money we've saved, we can still move forward. We're slicing it very, very thin, but it's doable.

The only issue is that the money we were saving, was for Phase 3 – the South end renovation; So that might be delayed a bit when the time comes . . .

But we feel it's more important to move ahead *now*, and trust the Lord for the future, when the time comes (**North End Schematic**)

In the meantime, in Phase 2, we can look forward to – a multi-purpose gym, more classroom space, more office space . . .

Sound proof space for the Worship and Production Ministries, and a green room that will double as a break room and additional meeting space.

It's not a complicated build-out, but it provides exactly what we need, and affords us the opportunity to do more, and do it better.

So we praise God for the ability to move forward, and are so very thankful for your generosity and sacrifice to make it happen.

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- **Lk 10:25-37**; I want to start our conference with a topic we're all too familiar with, but not so intentional about sometimes; At least I know I'm not. And that's loving our neighbor.

But before we get there, I want to put this message in the *larger* context of our Outreach Ministry in general; And do so with the hope that you'll . . .

Catch the vision

That you'll catch the vision for outreach in general.

And there are 3 main parts to it – our purpose, our commitments, and our opportunities. And I want to briefly touch on each one; So first of all . . .

- **Our purpose is to connect with people who are disconnected from God**

Or disengaged from his work; Or separated from his people; We want to *connect* with them; And do so – **In our neighborhood; In our city; In our nation; In our world**

It's similar to what Jesus said in Acts 1:8 – *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Neighborhoods, cities, nations, and world; But in order to *be* his witnesses, we have to connect; That's the *first* part of our vision; Second, is . . .

- **Our commitments**

And they lie in 4 general areas; As a church, we're committed first of all, to . . .

Church Planting – to people and ministries that establish or strengthen Bible-believing, Bible-preaching, Christ-exalting churches.

Strategic Involvement – with people and ministries who serve among unreached *people* groups, or in under-reached *areas*; Including your own neighborhood, or city.

Leadership Development – equipping leaders in their character, competency, calling, and capacity.

Mobilized Membership – which means equipping, encouraging, and supporting *you* to reach out; To do the work of ministry, wherever God calls; And then 3rd, is . . .

- **Our opportunities**

And the sky's the limit here, but we've narrowed them down to 7; Including . . .

Outreach Updates – to keep you informed.

Special Speakers – to stir your heart and broaden your horizons from time to time.

Small Group Involvement – so you can serve with others, as a group.

Partner Connections – so you can pray, contact, and bless those who live all this.

Urban Exposures – like directed tours to increase your awareness; Or the Urban Plunge trip to Century Woods coming up, that's in your bulletin.

Short-term Trips – to serve those in another culture or geographical setting.

Vocational Partnerships – where you pull up roots, live in another culture, and spread the gospel as one of our partners.

Those are some of the opportunities (**Summary**), arising from our commitments, and driven by our purpose – to connect with people who are disconnected from God. That's the vision for outreach.

- And once you've *caught* it, putting it into practice starts at home – w/ those closest to you. Like Jesus said when he summed up the Law in **Mt 22:39** – *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*; That is, with the same passion and care and attention . . . That you afford yourself; That you show yourself.

But that begs the question – Who *is* your neighbor? And it's a *good* question; In fact, it's crucial I think, in order to *love* your neighbor. So the first thought I want to commend to you, is to . . .

Ask the question

If I'm to love my neighbor, who exactly *is* my neighbor?

It's so simple, but seldom done I think, b/c we're scared of the answer; Scared of what it might mean for us.

Especially if it includes those closest to us; Those who know us; Those in our immediate proximity; Is that you, like it is me?

“I don't want to ask the question; I might have to love so-and-so; I might have to get involved in you-know-who's life; Who *knows* what I might get sucked into”

Desperate to avoid any pressure, responsibility, or conviction from the Holy Spirit – we go dark; We don't ask anything.

- Or, we ask like the lawyer here in Lk 10; Who was trying to rationalize and *justify* – his lack of love; Look at **v27**; In response to Jesus' question, he sums up the Law, saying “*You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself.*” And he [Jesus] said to him, “*You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.*” 29 But he, desiring to *justify* himself, said to Jesus, “*And who is my neighbor?*”

IOW he was trying to get Jesus to condone his *lack* of love for those around him, instead of getting his input on who he *should* be loving.

He wanted to know who he *didn't* have to love, instead of who he *did*.

Don't *be* like that; And don't *ask* like that; Ask honestly
B/c if you don't, chances are you'll *never* know; And if you never know, you'll never obey; You'll never obey the command of Jesus . . .
To love your neighbor at *all*, let alone like you do yourself; Ask the question

And then . . .

Identify them by name

That's the next step toward loving them

And I want you to think about something for a second

When Jesus said, "Love your neighbor" – What if, just what if, he actually meant our *literal* neighbors?

What if that was *assumed*? And I think it *was* given the communal nature of their society at that time

What if loving our *actual* neighbors, is one of the groups Jesus had in mind when he said – *Love your neighbor as yourself*? What if?

- And what if that's the group Satan works hardest to *keep* us from
I think it was C.S. Lewis who first expressed the thought – that one of the more devious devices of the devil . . .
Is to get us to express our *love* to those halfway around the world, and our hate to those next door; So that our love becomes largely imaginary, and our hate, largely real

I resonate with that; I can't *prove* that goes on, but it seems like a great way to subvert our kingdom efforts; And prevent life-giving, life-changing community

Get people to love the nameless, faceless *masses* for the most part, in place of those next door; Or, overwhelm them with so *many* names in their neighborhood and life . . .

That they suffer analysis paralysis; Ever been there? I have; It's the thought that – "I have so many neighbors I don't know where to start;" So we don't

- Which is why we printed that **tic-tac-toe board** in your bulletin; It's a little memory device, to help you be intentional and realistic
The idea being, that your life and neighborhood is like a tic-tac-toe board, with yourself in the middle; And your *neighbors* consist of those people . . .
Who are closest to your house, your office, and your activities
Your **Home Base, Work Place, and Third Space**

For instance, if you share a cubicle partition, or an office wall with someone who doesn't know the Lord, or isn't living for him . . .

They would probably be one of your work place neighbors

Or if you share a yard line or a cul de sac with someone – they'd be your Home Base neighbors; And your Third Space neighbors . . .

Would those people with whom you do sports, or hang out, or serve in the community

Whatever the case, identify those you're closest to in each arena, and write their names in

Including at least 2 names from each; IOW they can't be all from work; Or home

But whoever they are, identify them by name, and write them in

B/c after asking who they are, that's the next step toward loving them*****

But that's definitely *not* where it stops

You can have the best list in the world, but if you do nothing with it, it's all for naught
Which is why you also need to . . .

B.L.E.S.S. them

After identifying them, B.L.E.S.S. them; It's an acronym that represents a simple strategy for loving them; Starting with prayer

B – Begin to pray for them

No prayer, no love; It's as simple as that; Loving people outside your natural affinity, or those you're not naturally drawn to – requires prayer

So every time you drive by their house or walk by their office, you might pray – "Lord, would you draw them to yourself?"

"Lord, would you give me an opportunity to speak to them? And the courage to follow through?" Begin to pray for them

B/c if there's no prayer, there's no love; No impulse

L – Listen carefully to them

Listen when they're talking, and when they're not; Listen to what they're *saying*, and what they're not saying; And observe them – not like a creeper . . .

But one who's genuinely interested in their life; And then ask them about it

Ask them about their life; And listen carefully to their answers

E – Eat a meal with them

I'm not saying every night, or even every week

Maybe you want to set aside one night a *month* to have someone over

Or put a soup night on the calendar every now and then – that's what Becky and I are thinking about for *our* neighborhood

Putting 3 or 4 soups on the burner, passing out little invitation cards, and inviting people into our home, open house style

With the thought that they might stay for *15* minutes, or an *hour* and 15 minutes; It doesn't matter; We just want an opportunity to interact

For you, it might be a S'mores night, or an ice cream social, or a BBQ, or a *sit* down meal, or lunch with a co-worker; Whatever the case, *bless* your neighbors . . .

Home base, work place, *and* third space – by eating a meal with them

S – Serve and support them

This is where the parable of The Good Samaritan applies most directly – when people need help; Maybe they've just gone through a surgery

Or someone in their family died; Or they lost their job; Or tackled a project big enough for 6 people

The possibilities are endless here, but the point is simple – serve and support them at their point of need; With *whatever* they need

Not like you have all the answers, or you're their knight in shining armor – but as someone who cares, and can lend a helping hand

Someone with a shoulder to cry on; Someone they can depend on

S – Share the gospel with them

Connecting with those who are disconnected from God, without sharing the gospel – is akin to making them feel better, on their way to feeling worse; Way worse

Now, I'm not saying you should share with them the first time you get *together*
I'm saying that should be your *goal*; Not to *save* them, but *share* with them
To share *your* story as part of *God's* story; Your testimony as part of *the* testimony

B/c when you get right down to it – that's the most loving thing you can *do*
Giving them the good news of Jesus, and telling them how *you've* embraced it, and how it's changed *your* life – is *love* through and through; Keeping it to yourself, isn't
In fact, keeping it to yourself is one of the most *unloving* things you could do
Overcome your fears, and ask them if you can share your heart

- **Lee Strobel** once said – “*I've seen far too many Christians who are more than willing to travel halfway around the world to volunteer for a week in an orphanage, // but who cannot bring themselves to take the personal risk of sharing Jesus with the co-worker who sits day after day in the cubicle right next to them.*”

Or the house right next to them; If that's you, I struggle with that as well
It's *way* easier to go somewhere else and be bold; Who cares what they think? You're leaving in a week*****

But the thought that *helps* me, is that sharing the gospel isn't where it starts; It starts with prayer, and listening, and eating, and helping
And the more you do *that*, the more burdened you'll be; And the more burdened you are, the more you'll share
Or as **Francis Chan** said it – “*Once your heart breaks enough for people, you'll find a way to get the message to them.*”

- And then there's **Charles Spurgeon**, that great 19th century pastor, who said – “*The fact is, brethren, we must have conversion work here. We cannot go on as some churches do without converts. We cannot, we will not, we must not, we dare not. // Souls must be converted here, and if there be not many born to Christ, may the Lord grant to me that I may sleep in the tomb and be heard no more. // Better indeed for us to die than to live, if souls be not saved.*”

That's one of the reasons I praise God for those of you who received Christ last week; Not to mention the fact that I don't *want* to die yet ☺
But that's the *mindset* I have; And the *mindset* I want to have as a church – *we must have conversion work here*
Not for our glory, but God's; Not for our sake, but theirs
And it starts, by *blessing* your neighbor (**B.L.E.S.S. Summary**); Bless them; And last . .

Be a neighbor

Catch the vision; Ask the question; Identify them by name; Bless your neighbors; And *be* one; *Be* a neighbor

After telling the parable of The Good Samaritan, Jesus asked a very interesting question in v36 – *Which of these three* [referring to the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan] . . .
Which of these three do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among

the robbers?” [37] *He* [the lawyer] *said*, “*The one who showed him mercy.*” And *Jesus said to him*, “*You go, and do likewise.*”

As in, you go, and be a neighbor too; You go, and bless others too

You see, in addition to answering the question “Who *is* my neighbor?” – Jesus turned the tables and said we need to *be* one
Instead of functional hermits, we need to reach out
Instead of keeping to *ourselves*, we need to keep watch for others
Instead of loving ourselves – we need to love them
Instead of *hiding* behind our fears, we need to overcome them
Instead of *hoarding* our time, we need to give it
Instead of closing our eyes, we need to open them
Instead of hardening our hearts, we need to soften them (**Summary**)

We're in this together; So let's commit to these things – and trust God for the results, shall we?

Pray – Lord, would you instill in us a newfound passion for the souls of our neighbors?
Would you burden us with their plight in life and eternity? And would you help us overcome our fears to ask the question and share the gospel? Help us I pray – for your glory, and our joy; And use our tithes now, for more and more conversion work