



Session 5: Discernment & Wisdom

Introduction

Loving your neighbors—like any form of community service—will eventually be messy business. Complete this thought: “If I actually get fully invested in my neighbors’ lives, then ...”

Jesus Heals the Sick

Mark 1:29–39

Describe the boundaries Jesus set in this story.

Imagine if Jesus would have said “Sure!” when his disciples told him that everyone was looking for him. What would have happened?

Application for Our Lives

The first challenge is showing discernment. When you love your neighbors as yourselves, you will eventually face difficult situations and needy, dependent people. It is important to set healthy boundaries. Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon suggest distinguishing between being responsible *to* a person (which is healthy) and being responsible *for* a person (which is unhealthy).¹ What does that distinction look like in the following scenarios? Pick some and discuss:

¹ Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 134–136.

- Your neighbors are fighting, because their marriage is falling apart, and they need to be separated for a week.
- Your neighbors are struggling to make ends meet and need help financially.
- Your neighbors' car broke down, and they can't get to work or school on a consistent basis.
- Your neighbors are always busy, and they need people to pick up their kids from their activities.
- Your neighbor's kid is struggling in school because he grew up in a home with drugs and alcohol.
- Your neighbors got laid off from their work.

The second challenge is showing wisdom. The fact is, you can only have deep relationships with a finite amount of people. Some reasons people don't connect with others are listed below.² Think back to a time in life when you tried to reach out to someone, but it didn't seem to go anywhere. Discuss: When that happens, when do you keep trying? When do you move on to someone else?

- They are too busy.
- They are wary of you.
- They are already relationally full.
- They are in a different stage of life.
- They are afraid of exposure.

Conclusion

Return to your goals and plans for developing better relationships with your neighbors from the previous two weeks. Make your goals and plans more specific by specifying not only what you *will do* but also what you *will not do*. As Pathak and Runyon summarize, "Be friendly with everyone and be close to a few."³ Which people and opportunities seem the wisest to focus on? Which people and opportunities seem the wisest to not focus on?

² Pathak & Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 144–145.

³ Pathak & Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 154.