

Be a Christian Neighbor
August 9, 2015

So how many people are running for president next year? I believe the count, right now, is 4 democrats, 1 independent, and 17 republicans. And that doesn't count anyone in the other four parties who will run. It can be really hard to decide on a candidate to vote for among so many people. That list will get whittled down before election time, but even then we will have 6 or 7 candidates to choose from. The more options you have, the harder to decide among them.

That was the problem in Israel in the first century AD. One of the burning questions of that day was this: "Of the 613 commands in the Law Moses, which is the most important?" This question was hotly debated in the temple, the synagogues, and anywhere that people gathered.

It is no wonder then that people wanted to know where Jesus stood on this question.

Matthew 22:34-40 (NIV) Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'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. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Our focus this morning is on that second commandment. "Love your neighbor as yourself." Before we can know how to love our neighbor we need to know how we love ourselves. How do I love myself? How do you love yourself? Primarily, we love ourselves by doing whatever we can to meet our needs. We need shelter, clothes, food, health, friends, and forgiveness of sin.

To love our neighbors as ourselves means to be concerned with their needs too. I don't believe he means that we are to pay our neighbor's mortgage, or provide all his food and clothes. But as we learn of a need that our neighbor has, we can meet it if we can.

This morning I want us to focus on a specific need of our neighbor. One need, indeed a great desire of our neighbor is for good neighbors. Our neighbor wants good neighbors. Just like we want good neighbors. So this morning I want to give you some wisdom from God's word, on how to be a good neighbor to your neighbors.

Be a Quiet neighbor. I love this next verse.

Proverbs 27:14 (NIV) If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

Isn't that great? If you are not in the habit of reading your Bible, you are missing such wisdom and humor.

Be a good neighbor by being a quiet neighbor. That doesn't mean you never do anything loud at your house, like mow the grass, play loud music, or have a party that the neighbors can hear. But be aware of how long such things last, and how early or late they take place.

Also be aware of such things as your dog barking. Keep your barking dog quiet early in the morning and late at night, or all day if your dog is an outside-all day barker. And while we are on the subject of dogs, make sure you clean up after your dog, whether you walk him or he just uses your own yard. The smells carry in the wind.

Be a helpful neighbor.

If you see your neighbor working on a project, offer to help. Years ago I was building a retaining wall in my yard. My neighbor across the street noticed and came over to see and volunteered to help. He did a lot of hard work helping me. I was impressed... and grateful. If you can help a neighbor with a need, do so. That is the point of the next verse.

Proverbs 3:28 (NIV) Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow"-- when you now have it with you.

This verse is about those who are asked by a neighbor for help. Help them at the moment, even if it interrupts what you are already doing.

Another aspect of being helpful is to ask how you can help. Don't wait to be asked for your help. You do the asking. If you see your neighbor involved in a project, or hear of one coming up, ask, "What can I do to help you?"

I also want to say that if at any time your neighbor offers to help you with one of your projects, say yes. Don't be one of those prideful Christians who never accepts help. It is not a virtue to never accept help that is offered. Instead, it is a sin. It is rooted in pride, the pride of wanting to be self-sufficient. So if your neighbor offers to help, let him. Let her. Be grateful and say so.

Be a Trustworthy Neighbor.

One man recounts the following story.

One day, when I was about eight, I was playing beside an open window while Mrs. Brown confided to my mother a serious problem concerning her son. When Mrs. Brown had gone, my mother, realizing I had heard everything, said: "If Mrs. Brown had left her purse here today, would we give it to anyone else?"

Oh, no," I replied.

Mother continued: "Mrs. Brown left something more precious than her pocketbook today. She left a story that could make many people unhappy. it is still hers, even though she left it here. So we shall not give it to anyone. Do you understand?"

I did. And I have understood ever since that a confidence or a bit of careless gossip which a friend has left at my house is his - not mine to give to anyone .

You may hear something or see your neighbor doing something that would make good gossip. Keep it to yourself, and then promptly forget you heard or saw it.

Proverbs 11:13 (NIV) A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

Keeping a secret is huge in any relationship. Failing to keep a secret can not only ruin one relationship, but all of your relationships. If people learn that you will not keep their secrets, no one will want to be your friend.

Be a mind-your-own-business neighbor.

You can't be much more to your neighbors than they want you to be. If they don't want to be friends, you have to accept that. You can still be friendly, be helpful, and inviting. But if they make it clear they just want to be left alone and want nothing to do with you, then respect that.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (NIV) Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders...

Jesus sent His disciples out to all the towns and villages to announce the arrival of the kingdom of God. But He told them that if everyone in the town rejected them and wanted them to leave them alone, then they were to do just that.

Gaining the respect of your neighbors also is affected by maintaining your home, keeping your grass cut, and the clutter picked up. Let's make an attractive neighborhood for everyone.

Be a missionary neighbor.

As Christians, we are missionaries with Jesus wherever we are. We are to be missionaries to our neighbors, to work with Jesus in bringing them to a knowledge of the good news. All of what we have said so far is part of that. But as missionaries we must take it one step further. So far, any non-Christian might try to do the same things. As a Christian neighbor, we must seek to help them with their need for the Savior.

Matthew 28:19 (NIV) ... go and make disciples of all nations (peoples, neighbors)...

Each of us Christians has a mission field. My mission field is different than your mission field. The people God brings you into contact with at school, at work, while running errands, and in your neighborhood are your mission field.

Be an intercessor. Pray for their general well-being as a family, that God will bless them. And also pray for any specific needs you become aware of.

Let them know you are praying about a specific need.

Be a greeter. Be the one who initiates a "Hello", a conversation.

One of my neighbors walks his dog but never initiates conversation. If I choose not to initiate conversation, and being naturally shy I am likely not to, then no relationship can develop. Be courageous and just say hello. Don't wait until you make eye contact.

In your conversation, speak well of God. Make comments like, "Didn't God give us a beautiful day?"

Be an inviter. Invite your neighbors to special events at your church.

How many of your neighbors have children who might be interested in coming to church, but their own moms or dads won't bring them. YOU could be the church bus for them. Invite them. Offer to bring them. Offer to bring them home too. You could be instrumental in that child becoming a Christian. And through that one person's salvation a whole family may get saved. We have seen it happen before.

Be the street organizer. Bring neighbors together. Host a BBQ, a drop-in, or ice cream social for people to meet and get to know each other. Help the neighbors become a neighborhood. Use such events to help your neighbors build relationships with each other. Learn names, phone numbers, and listen for needs to pray about, and maybe help with.

These are just some of the ways we can be a good neighbor to our neighbors. The ultimate goal, of course, is the salvation of each person. Jesus wants all of your neighbors to be saved from their sins. Work with Jesus on this important goal.

So this week in your prayers, talk to God about how you can and will be more of a good neighbor to your neighbors.