

Why Should I Love My Neighbors?

A discussion-based Bible study lesson plan focused on Luke 10:27

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Objectives:

- A. First and foremost, to create a setting in which God's Spirit can speak to us through the Great Commandments.
- B. To learn from this passage, from the voices of its characters, and from one another's perspectives.
- C. To share an experience of openness, spiritual growth, and fellowship as a group.
- D. To recognize, or re-recognize, that prejudice is widespread among human beings and human cultures, and can be based on any of numerous factors and characteristics. (In other words, it's more pervasive and more varied than we may realize.)
- E. More specifically, to challenge ourselves to take a fresh look at prejudices.
 1. Prejudices that existed in the Holy Land during the first century.
 2. Prejudices that exist today—in the United States and around the world.
 3. Prejudices that may exist closer to home.
 - a. In our local community?
 - b. In our church?
 - c. In our own hearts and minds?
- F. To consider what we believe God thinks about prejudice, and to think about how our desire to follow God's will might guide us as we deal with prejudices—our own, and those of others.

Assumptions & Understandings:

- A. This lesson plan is written for use by adults, although it could be also used with youth/teens/adolescents.
- B. This lesson plan is focused on Luke 10:27, although certainly the facilitator or group members should feel free to bring other scriptural passages into the discussion.
- C. This lesson plan will most likely be used with a church-based small group or class (probably meeting either at the church or at a member's home), though it could be utilized in other contexts.
- D. The author of this lesson plan anticipates that it will most likely require only a single session of between 60 and 75 minutes, though "spilling over" into a second session is certainly an option.
- E. The author is writing with respect for multicultural diversity in mind, and is a clergy spouse who is female and African-American.
- F. The author believes that prejudice is a negative aspect of the human condition—a manifestation of our imperfection and sinfulness. Love out loud!

Supplies:

- A. Bible(s)
 1. At a minimum, you as the facilitator should have a Bible for your own use during the session.
 2. If you think you'll want to compare translations during the session, you'll want to have various translations on hand (or have an app on your phone or tablet that offers multiple versions of the Bible).
 3. If you think some may attend without bringing their own Bibles, you might have a few extra Bibles on hand as a courtesy.

- B. Something to write on and visibly display to the group. Options:
 1. A whiteboard—with markers, eraser, and easel.
 2. A chalkboard—with chalk, eraser, and easel.
 3. A large pad of newsprint—with markers and easel.
- C. Refreshments are entirely at your discretion as the facilitator. You might have coffee and cookies, lemonade and brownies, iced tea and a bowl of candy, soft drinks and pretzels, or none of the above.
- D. Of course, seating is essential. You'll want to make sure you have plenty of chairs to accommodate the largest foreseeable number of attendees. Ideally, chairs would be arranged in a circle or oval, if feasible.

Convening the Group:

- A. As attendees are entering, gathering, and or mingling, you'll want to call the group session to order without being too abrupt or heavy handed. This should occur as close to the stated start time as possible.
- B. Welcoming all attendees and thanking them for coming.
- C. It might be friendly, helpful, and fun to go around and have each attendee introduce themselves by saying his/her first name and a biblical figure that s/he finds to be an example of a good neighbor. If you want to make it more challenging, you can stipulate "no repeats."

Opening Prayer Options:

- A. As the facilitator, you might lead the opening prayer yourself, setting the tone for the discussion.
- B. Or, if you prefer, you could ask for a volunteer to lead the group in a brief prayer.

An Opening Story:

Whether you use a textbook or create your own course curriculum sharing your personal insight on racial or unjust treatment to the class, encourage the class members to participate in the discussions. This is what I would share with the class:

Currently, I do not know who are my neighbors. Out of 133 homeowners in my neighborhood I know perhaps ten. Most of my neighbors moved out within seven years of their homeownership. I live now in a transitional community with many different families. This is in great contrast to my parents, who knew most of their neighbors and formed great family friendships. Most of their neighbors lived in the neighborhood for more than thirty years. My parents knew their neighbors' children, grandchildren and extended family members. Rarely did any of them talk about moving to another home unless it was time to retire, or they needed to move to convalescent home, or upon the death of a spouse. My parents felt a sense of common values with their neighbors. They looked like our family, spoke the same language and practiced the same traditions.

Today, I only occasionally see and speak to any of my neighbors. If I do, it's a forced greeting exchange. My neighborhood is filled with diverse younger families mostly from foreign countries. I do not see anyone like me in my neighborhood. I often wonder if we have anything in common.

This was true until one day, when God made a way for me to have a meaningful conversation with a new neighbor. I saw my neighbor and I said "hello" as I usually do. At first I thought I was going to receive the same strained "hello" in return. Not this time. My neighbor walked over to me and asked for my help. The person needed professional assistance and the kindness of a loving neighbor. I agreed to make some telephone calls for my neighbor. With the presence of the Holy Spirit, I used this time to console my neighbor.

My neighbor was frightened to have the local police to come to the home because of prior

incidents that had happened. At the last reported incident, the unprofessional behavior displayed by the police officer made my neighbor doubt that fair treatment would be given on this incident call. I shared with my neighbor that God would protect and guide the family with grace and mercy through their situation (Isaiah 54:17). My neighbor was also looking for justice and equitable treatment from the neighborhood and from me.

Through God, our neighbors will find peace and trust in their neighborhood. From our national leaders then, they will have the courage to ask for help on their own and stand as witnesses to fight the spirit of wickedness.

An Opening Brainstorm:

(If this same brainstorm was used in a previous Bible Study, instead ask if any new ideas have come to mind since the prior study.)

- A. The Oxford English Dictionary definitions of "prejudice" include the following:
1. to affect injuriously or unfavorably by doing some act, or as a consequence of something done; to injure or impair the validity of;
 2. to judge beforehand, to prejudge unfavorably;
 3. to affect of fill with a prejudice, to prepossess with an opinion; to give a bias or bent to, influence the mind or judgement of beforehand.
- B. Let's try to list as many different types of prejudice as we can. (Use whiteboard, chalkboard or newsprint.)
1. We can start with two obvious examples: race (i.e. racism) and gender (i.e. sexism). But there are many more. What would you add?
 2. Note to the facilitator: There are many possibilities including age, class, country of origin, height, weight, municipality and state of residence, type of car that one drives, political persuasion, clothing, religious affiliation, occupation, etc. If your group gets stuck after only a small number of ideas are voiced, you might gently prompt them with a couple of these.
- C. Two quick questions as we look at our list:
1. How do you think prejudice affects our neighborliness?
 2. How do you think God would like us to act as a neighbor? (Use whiteboard, chalkboard or newsprint.)

Bible References:

Read each passage and add to your list of how God would like us to act as a neighbor. What does each passage say to us? Why do we think this is important to God?

Luke 10:27

He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself."

Jeremiah 7:5-7

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave to your ancestors forever and ever.

Leviticus 19:16

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand idly by when the blood of your neighbor is at stake: I am the Lord.

Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Discussion Questions:

- A. How well do we know our own neighbors?
- B. What keeps us from getting to know them?
- C. How have our neighbors treated us?
- D. What is the atmosphere of our neighborhoods?
- E. What would need to change to know our neighbors more?
 1. What would personally need to change?
 2. What would need to change in the neighborhood?
- F. How do we view those whose backgrounds are different than our own? (skin color, education, wealth, language, family size, religion, etc.)
- G. How might these personal views grow in understanding and love?
- H. In what situations might we help a neighbor that we do not know well?
- I. What might it look like to take action toward loving our neighbors?
- J. How would it feel to consider everyone our neighbor?
- K. How does being a good neighbor impact racism?

Coming Full Circle:

- A. Remember that quote from Martin Luther King, Jr:
"The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers."
- B. Regardless of our stage in life, we can all grow in our love of God and love of our neighbors by recognizing our prejudices, and working on alleviating them.

Closing Prayer Options:

- A. As the facilitator, you might lead the closing prayer yourself.
- B. Or, if you prefer, you could ask for a volunteer to lead the group in a brief prayer.
- C. While time constraints may make it tempting to skip the closing prayer, that is not recommended. Even a very brief word of prayer can be the perfect way to wrap up the discussion, while of course honoring God and humbly asking for God's help.

Adjourning the Group:

- A. Thank everyone for their attendance, and for their willingness to engage with one another on a topic that can feel delicate or uncomfortable.
- B. If this group is going to have future sessions (for example, if this session was part of an on going group in your church), remind the attendees of the date and time of the next meeting.
- C. Wish everyone a good day or good evening, and declare the meeting to be adjourned.
- D. If refreshments remain available, you might invite folks to partake.

Additional Scripture References to Ponder at Home:

- Explain the importance of racial and social justice components in the Bible study lesson as it relates to today's Christians (Romans 8:28).
- Step out in love get to know and to help your neighbors (Colossians 3:14).
- God will supply you with confidence and strength to help your neighbors when you help them through life challenges (Philippians 4:13).
- Provide your neighbors with hope to fight against unjust laws that continue to allow the practices of hatred (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).
- As Christians, we are to love our neighbors (Luke 10:27).
- We should follow the royal Law (James 2:8).
- Christians should not promote gossip or the malicious treatment of neighbors (Proverbs 20:19 & 1 Timothy 5:13).
- Have an honest relationship with your neighbors (Jeremiah 7:5 and Leviticus 19:16).
- Inspire other to be a good neighbors (Luke 10:25-37).
- Learn to be humble and strong in God (Philippians 3:3 and John 15:5).
- Thank God for all our blessings (Luke 18:9-14).
- The tie that binds all of us is God's love (Colossians 3:11).
- Trust in God and He will protect you from these life troubles (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).
- Believe in God's wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:7).