

**Go Light Your World:
Lighting up Your Neighborhood
Acts 13:44-49**

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August 28, 2005

Love your neighbor as you love yourself. The Bible is quite insistent about that. Eight times from Leviticus to First John the Bible comes right out and commands it. Numerous times it is mentioned as the foundation of all human relationships. Loving your neighbor is not a plaque to be posted in our court houses. It is a principle to apply in our lives. What part of neighbor don't we understand?

NEIGHBORS ARE THOSE NEARBY

The literal translation of neighbor is the "the person next to a person." Turn to the person next to you and say, "Hi Neighbor, where do you live?" Your spouse or parent may be grateful that you have finally spoken to them today.

Jim Moore tells the story about an elderly woman who was dying in the hospital. Her son flew in to be with her. "I happened to be present when he arrived," writes Jim. "The son walked over to the bedside of his aged and dying mother, kissed her on the cheek and said, 'Mom, you have been such a good mother to me and I want you to know that I love you.'" Jim says the elderly woman started crying. Through her tears she said to her son, "Last Friday was your 63rd birthday and that is the first time you ever told me that you loved me."

The reason some of us treat our neighbors poorly is that we treat ourselves and our families poorly. Love your neighbor begins at home.

When people get together they congregate in neighborhoods. This week my neighborhood association sent me a list of things I needed to do in order to be a good neighbor. Among them are these:

- Clean up after your dog.
- Do not park your car on the street.
- Do not put a basketball goal in your driveway.
- Cut your grass and clean out your flowerbeds.

Since I don't have a dog, and my kids are grown and I'm too old to play basketball, I've got it made as long as I can keep Sandy doing yard work.

Most of us are fortunate to live in good neighborhoods. When I hurried off on vacation a couple of years ago, leaving our garage door wide open, our neighbor came over and closed it for us. For nearly two years now, another neighbor

whom we have nicknamed the 'paper fairy' lays our morning paper at the door. Who could ask for anything more?

What kind of neighbor am I to those who are nearby? Not as good as I was ten years ago. Sure, I smile, wave and speak but I don't take the time to know my neighbors as well as I used to.

Novelist Jonathan Franzen writes "The American family today is a tiny nuclear unit inhabiting an enormous house in which each person has his or her own bedroom and bathroom. It is no longer a rule that you know your neighbors. Communities increasingly tend to be virtual, the participants either faceless or firmly in control of the face they present to others. Transportation is largely private; the latest SUV's are the size of living rooms and come with onboard telephones, CD players, and TV screens where people sit behind the tinted windows of one of these high-riding 'I see you but you can't see me' mobile privacy guard units." No wonder we feel isolated. Love your neighbor, start nearby.

NEIGHBORS ARE THOSE IN NEED

For years now State Farm Insurance has advertised their business with this slogan. "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there." I suspect that promise is only partially true. Like any insurance company, State Farm is there:

- If you pay your premiums in a timely fashion.
- If you don't have too many accidents in one year.

Jesus had a better idea of a good neighbor. In answer to a lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told a story that the world cannot forget: An unnamed man, who probably should have known better, was traveling the bloody Jericho Road when he was attacked and beaten by robbers who left him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. Then a religious Levite showed up. He took one look at the bloody man and thinking it best not to get involved, passed by on the other side. A little while later, a Samaritan came by. Jews hated Samaritans but need knows no barriers. When the Samaritan saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, took him to an inn and made him comfortable. The next morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper saying, "Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill and I will pay you on my way back."

"Which of the three," asked Jesus, "do you think was a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?" Now, what part of neighbor don't you understand?

How well do we hear the cry of the needy? Some years ago researchers at Princeton Theological Seminary asked 40 ministerial students to walk next door and give an impromptu speech on the Good Samaritan. Meanwhile, researchers

planted a slumped, groaning, broken man beside the sidewalk on which the students had to travel. Guess what? More than half of the ministerial students passed by the broken man without stopping.

So the age-old story holds true. While people bleed beside the road, most of us are content to read about it, talk about it, and maybe even attend conferences concerning it. Meanwhile, thank God for the minority who walk the walk as well as talk the talk. They have eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts that care for the least and the lost along the road. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Stop. Look. Listen. Neighbors are those in need.

NEIGHBORS ARE THOSE WE HAVE NOT YET MET

When Paul and Barnabas got kicked out of Antioch for having too many converts, they claimed the Lord's promise made to Isaiah centuries before: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

Isn't it amazing how the Lord refuses to let the Gospel become the possession of any particular race, religion or region? Jesus Christ is not about to be contained by any culture, clan, or country!

Privilege is granted only to be shared. If we fail to share it, we are likely to forfeit it. Let Christians in America take note. The message of Jesus Christ is not our property to be dispensed to those we like and kept from those we despise.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. The world God loves includes more than right wing, white, conservative Christians in the South. God loves the Muslims as much as he loves the Methodists. God loves the Mexicans as much as he loves Europeans. God loves people regardless of their sex or sexual orientation, their color or creed, their age or stage of life. While we might appropriately debate the true nature of God, and the right behavior for believers, let us never sink into the moral quagmire of demonizing those different from us nor wallow in the consuming quicksand of hatred. Love has a better way!

Philippians 2:4 says, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

Did you hear the story about a woman who called a venetian blind repairman to pick up a faulty blind? The repairman rang the door bell the following Saturday. The husband answered the door. "I'm here for the venetian blind," explained the repairman. "Just a minute," said the husband who fetched his wallet, pulled a few dollars from it and gave it to the repairman and then went back to his breakfast. "Who was that at the door?" inquired his wife. "I don't know," grunted the husband, "Somebody collecting for the blind."

- 1) Loving calls for open eyes.
- 2) Loving calls for listening ears.
- 3) Loving calls for engaged minds.

4) Loving calls for servant hearts.

It was Immanuel Kant who said, "Loving unavoidably puts us side by side with strangers, with people alien to what we fancy." Neighbors are rich and poor, neighbors are black and white, neighbors are near and far away.

Oh Jesus, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

What kind of neighbor are YOU?