

HOW TO
NEIGHBOR

Pastor Michael O'Neill
October 2, 2016

**Part 3: Taking the
Great Commandment Seriously**

Mark 12:30-31; Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 10:25-37

1. Motives Matter

- *Matthew 6:1; 1 Timothy 1:5*

2. Introductions Matter

- *1 Corinthians 6:19; Colossians 1:27; Proverbs 27:9,
Proverbs 12:26; 1 Peter 3:14-16*

- **Yourself**

- **Them**

- **Jesus**

3. Invitations Matter

- *Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:34; Matthew 22:9-10;
Romans 15:13*

love.learn.live.

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West Valley Church
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How to Neighbor Part 3: Taking the Great Commandment Seriously¹

Today we are in the third part of a four-part sermon series called “How to Neighbor” – turning the word “neighbor” from a noun into a verb. When we say “How to neighbor,” we mean “how to act in ways toward our neighbors that reflect Jesus Christ and what he has told us to do as Christians and as neighbors.” What we call the “Great Commandment” is our guide. The Great Commandment is what Jesus said was the greatest and most important commandment of all; that if we obeyed the Great Commandment we’d be obeying everything in the Bible in one fell swoop:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”
(Mark 12:30-31, niv. Also Matthew 22:37-40, Luke 10:27-28)

If you were with us the last couple of weeks, you’ll remember we talked about how, if we truly love God, we will love our neighbors. We can’t separate the two. In fact, if we don’t love our neighbors, it calls into question our love for God. We defined who our neighbor is, using Jesus’ teaching from the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. We learned that our neighbor is going to be *different* than us – that we’ve got to be willing to get uncomfortable to be a good neighbor, and begin loving and serving those who are different than us. We also learned that our neighbor is *similar* to us; that we have the joy of loving and serving those in our own church, by being involved in a small group. There is no better way to grow in our faith and to learn to neighbor than by doing it first with those who are safe – those who are similar to us in a small group. In our small groups we help each other grow and support each other in life. If you are not yet in a small group, as strongly as I can, I invite you to join one. Trust me when I tell you that small groups are vital to your spiritual growth. I love the small group that Shelly and I are in, and I *need* our small group. *Please*: sign up for a small group if you are not in one and you’ll find what you’ve been missing.

¹ Much of the resources for this message are from “The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door,” by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, BakerBooks, Grand Rapids, MI, 2012. Secondary sources are from “The New Parish,” by Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, Intervaristy Press, Downer’s Grove, Ill., 2014, and “Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood,” by Alan Roxburgh, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.

We also learned that our neighbor includes those who are near to us: in other words, those within geographical proximity to us – our next-door neighbors. Some of our neighbors will be different than us, and some will be similar to us, but they *are* near to us. We need to start where we live by reaching out in love to those around us.

Last week we talked about making sure our definition of “neighbor” wasn’t some metaphorical, universal concept but that it was our real, next-door neighbor. You can’t love a concept, but you can love a person.

We looked at getting over the two biggest obstacles in order to love and serve our neighbors – one is the obstacle of time: that we need to create time in our lives for what really matters, which is to obey the Great Commandment. Then we talked about getting over our fear. Thanks to the overblown sensationalist media, we have a fear of people we don’t know. But our neighbors are just as afraid of us as we are of them, and someone has to break the cycle of fear and reach out in love through practical ways. When we do that, we open the door for God to do amazing things through our lives.

So we want to spend some time today talking about how important it is for us to take the Great Commandment seriously.

As we talk about loving and serving our neighbors, it is very important to remember that...

1. ***Motives* Matter**

We need to be very clear about something when we talk about how to neighbor: this is not an evangelism strategy. If evangelism is your only motive, you are not going to be a very good neighbor. But if you neighbor with the right motive, then people who don’t know God will most certainly come to know him.

Let me put it this way: I’ve had so many people in my life try to get me to sell a certain company’s product. I won’t say what it is, but this company sells products, but the big money is getting others to sell the product for you, and then getting others to get others to sell the product under you. Now, if you sell this product, good for you. They have many good products. But for some reason in the ten times (at least) that I’ve been approached about selling this product by either friends, family members, or people that I thought were becoming friends, they’ve all tried to sneakily convince me to sell it, and wanted me to enlist others to sell it so that I would move up the pyramid, or move higher in the category of jewels, or colors, or whatever. The goal, of course, is that they would make money off of me as I make money off of other people, and so on down the chain. Almost every time they started by asking curious questions about how I’d like to have all the money I’d ever want, or to give to my church, or to buy a new car or boat, or to pay off my debts – on and on. I had one person who was becoming a good friend, or so I thought. Then one day he wanted to meet for breakfast. I looked forward to it, until we sat down and he started in on his pitch for selling this product. I politely told him “no,” and I

gave him my reasons why I wouldn't be able to do that. The breakfast ended shortly after that, and I never heard from him again. He didn't return my calls.

I can't say that *every* person involved with that company is that way – I can only say that every person that has approached me has been that way.

Now, working in sales is a respectable profession. I'm not saying those people were bad or evil or anything. I just didn't appreciate their approach; it felt like they weren't interested in my well-being, they were interested in increasing the size of their pyramid.

But as a pastor, I've noticed some eerie similarities between some people in sales and how some Christians share their faith. In a well-meaning attempt to "sell" a good thing, we've all heard pastors and people who use high-pressure techniques to sell the gospel. They'll say things like, "What if you walk out of this room today and get hit by a bus?" or "What if you get diagnosed with cancer tomorrow?"

Now, what's behind these types of approaches might be honorable, but no one wants to come across like a telemarketer when they are talking about the most important message that we have to share. There is another way! For instance, it's important to know ***there is a difference between "Ulterior motives" and "Ultimate motives."*** "Ulterior" means "something is intentionally kept hidden or concealed." An ulterior motive is manipulative. It is when we do or say one thing out in the open, but we intend or mean another in private; we are trying to trick or control or manipulate someone into something.

On the other hand, "ultimate" means "the farthest point of a journey." An ultimate goal is an eventual point or a longed-for destination. So for example, when a person begins college hoping to become a physician one day. Or when a kid starts playing football with dreams of one day playing in the NFL.

The *ulterior* motive of neighboring must never be to share the gospel! But the *ultimate* motive is just that – to demonstrate the difference that Christ has made in our lives and to introduce him to our neighbors.

This is hugely significant to understand! There is a big difference between these two. The "agenda" we need to drop is the well-meaning attempts to become friends with our neighbors for the sole purpose of converting them to our faith. But this is nothing more than offering friendship with strings attached.

Now let me say that we *should* want to see our neighbors experience the love of God through Jesus Christ. "We believe that making a decision to enter into a relationship with God through his Son Jesus is the most important decision anyone can make. We believe that Jesus provides real solutions for people and that orienting our lives around him is the best way to live. We believe that Jesus answers the ultimate questions of life and has the ultimate answers for our cities and neighborhoods and nation."² Our hope, dream, desire, and prayer is that everyone will have a meaningful relationship with Jesus. So sharing what Christ has done for us and

² Art of Neighboring, 102

introducing others to him is the right motive, but it *cannot* be an ulterior motive in developing friendships with our neighbors. ***We don't love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted.***

The problem is that many Christians have been taught (by well-meaning people) that they should do nice things *only* for the opportunity to have a spiritual conversation, or to make a salvation sales pitch. But Jesus never told us to use bait-and-switch tactics where we become friends with people only to share spiritual truths with them. *We are called to love people.* Period. Whether those neighbors ever take any steps toward God is beside the point. We are called to love our neighbors unconditionally, without expecting anything in return. The Great Commandment says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The commandment ends there, with no other expectation given. Neighboring is an end in itself! (*repeat*). When we love our neighbors, we don't stop being friends with them or serving them if they show no interest in our faith or even decline our faith. We never cut someone loose because they aren't interested in Jesus. Motives matter! Jesus told us:

"Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1, nlt)

He didn't say we should not do good things; he said we should do good things for the *right reason*. And the right reason is love, as the Apostle Paul told Timothy:

"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Timothy 1:5, niv)

The great thing about what we are talking about is that you don't have to work up some kind of presentation or sales pitch. You don't have to be prepared to answer every objection that someone might have about Jesus Christ. You simply need to love your neighbor and build a genuine relationship with them. Pray for yourself and your motives. And please – by all means and always pray for your neighbors. Ask God to bless them, to create opportunities for you to meet them and love them. And of course, pray that they will one day know Jesus Christ personally.

As you love your neighbor, then you will have opportunity to the next thing that matters, and that is...

2. Introductions Matter

Our mission statement as a church consists of three things: introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose. We simplify those three into three key words: Love. Learn. Live. There is a reason that the first statement is to introduce people to Jesus Christ – it is our priority, and because that is what we do when we love others. We want to have the opportunity to introduce people to Jesus, but they won't meet him unless they first meet him in person – or, in other words, in *a* person, and that is *you* (if you are a Christian). Your neighbor needs to see Jesus in you and me, before they'll be willing to meet him themselves. So there are some introductions that need to happen.

The first introduction is:

- Yourself

You need to find ways to introduce yourself to your neighbors if you haven't already. This series is talking about building relationships – stepping out of what is comfortable, making and taking the time to get to know your neighbors. We talked last week about the need to get over the time barrier, get over the fear barrier, and make the introduction of yourself.

Remember, you are Jesus “in the flesh” – you might be the only opportunity they have to see Jesus up close and personal. The very Spirit of Jesus Christ himself resides in you:

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19, niv)

It is through his presence in *you* that your neighbors will see Christ – that's the way God intended for them to learn about Jesus:

“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
(Colossians 1:27, niv)

If Christ is in you, and they don't know you, then they will never get to see Christ in you. That means you simply introduce yourself, and do whatever you need to do to begin building a relationship. Look for opportunities to bless them with kindness; put their garbage cans back for them. Shovel their walk. Bake them a pie. Do simple acts of kindness for them, because this relationship isn't about just you. The next introduction that needs to happen is:

- Them

Once you've had the opportunity to take the initiative and introduce yourself to them, you need to let them introduce themselves to you. In other words, your whole goal is to develop relationship, so no sooner do you introduce yourself than you let them introduce themselves. And you need to help them do that. This means that you need to ask them questions, and most of all *you need to listen* to their answers! *Listen to them.*

Early on in our relationships, we talk with our neighbors about the things we both can see – the weather, the crazy color of a neighbor's house, the increased traffic on our street, how the Seahawks are doing – those kinds of things. But we rarely enter into conversations of depth with someone we've just met. We need to get beyond those things.

Start with finding out about them. Let me ask you this: How many of you know the color of the living room walls in three of your neighbors' homes? How about two of your neighbors? How about one? That question implies that you have gotten to

know them well enough that they've let you into their home. How many of your neighbors know the color of *your* living room walls? Have you let them in your home?

Do you know how long they have lived there?

Where did they grow up?

What do they do for a living?

Are they married? For how long?

Where did they meet?

Do they have kids? What are their kids' names? How old are they? When are their birthdays?

Here's the key – those are the basic things that people are usually willing to share. But as you learn their story, you will notice things you have in common. As you share the things you have in common, you will learn more: over time you will share your hopes and dreams and desires.

You can ask questions like, "What do you love most about what you do for a living?" And, "If you could do anything, what would you do?"

And then, as you LISTEN to them, you will begin to learn more: you'll begin to learn their regrets, their stresses and struggles, their losses and pain.

And it is in these conversations that, as you listen and as the relationship grows, you will learn how you can serve them and meet their needs in a deeper way. The Bible advises us:

"The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense."
(Proverbs 27:9, nlt)

You can be that kind of blessing to your neighbor.

It's true that most people are cautious about sharing deeper information with others. But after a relationship has begun and you show genuine interest, you might be surprised at what people will share. They may end up telling you about the loss of someone they loved, a difficult job situation, or some health problems they are facing. When we get authentic and honest, we create bridges for our friends to do the same with us.

You might learn that you can watch their house for them while they are gone, or bring over a meal once in awhile or on a regular basis, or that they are going through a difficult financial challenge that you can help them with, or that you can watch their little ones sometimes.

How have you blessed your neighbors in the last two weeks?

Do you see any unmet need in their life that you could meet? Look for their needs, and begin to meet them. In doing so, you will fulfill the Scripture that says:

"One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor..." (Proverbs 12:26, esv)

When you do these things, they have the best chance of seeing Christ in you. And that is when you can eventually be given the opportunity to introduce them to:

- Jesus

Because they will see Christ in you, and benefit from your blessings of kindness and friendship and being able to meet their needs, the time will come when they will ask you why you do these things for them. Or, when they are going through a difficult time, they will want to know how *you* handle it. That's when you can apply the Scripture that says:

“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience...” (1 Peter 3:14-16, niv)

Notice that it said to be ready to give an answer to everyone who *asks*, and to do it with *gentleness and respect*. That doesn't sound to me like the person standing on the street corner shouting at people who don't want to hear it! Instead, when you are blessing to others, you need to be ready to share your story of how Christ has made a difference in your life. They've seen him in you; now they can meet him too. But you don't save or convert them – that's the Holy Spirit's job. You must be ready to make the introductions – with gentleness and respect – *when they ask*.

Finally, as you learn to neighbor, remember that motives matter, introductions matter, and finally...

3. *Invitations* Matter

There is a reason that this is the third point; you want to follow these points in order. Make sure your motives are right, and keep making sure they are right. You want to love your neighbor and pray for your neighbor and be a blessing to your neighbor, even if they don't ever respond. But then go over and begin making introductions of yourself and of them. Then when they ask, you can give them a reason for the hope you have. Of course, they won't ask if they don't have a reason to ask, and their reason will come only as you love and bless them. But when they do ask, *it's okay to invite them to be a part of your church!* In fact, that ought to come naturally. If this is your church, and it is the place that you find you can draw close to Christ and gain help and encouragement from other believers, why wouldn't you want to invite them to be a part of that? You know your neighbor best; maybe the invitation will start with a barbecue that your small group is having. Or maybe it will be to join your small group. Perhaps you will invite them to bring their children or youth to an activity or event. Maybe you can bring them with you to Trunk or Treat, or Breakfast with Santa. Or maybe you can invite them to worship with you. Then take them out to lunch and ask them what they thought about it. Don't be

afraid to ask them what they liked and didn't like. And if they didn't like something, let me know – it might be something we need to change. We work very hard to make this a time and a place that is hospitable to our neighbors; we avoid using religious language, because we want everyone to understand. After all, the Bible says:

“So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt...Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 10:19, Leviticus 19:34, nlt)

If this is a place where you find Jesus – in worship, in your small group, in the ministries, in the faces of your friends, why wouldn't you invite your neighbor to join you – when they ask you for the reason for your hope?

Now, you don't want to begin the relationship with that; you don't want to say “Hi, my name is Mike and I live next door. Did you know God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life and I want you to come to church with me?” Don't do that unless you don't want them to talk to you again. But if, as you love and bless them and pray for them, the opportunity arises that they ask you for your hope, don't be afraid to tell them, and to invite them to join you! After all, Jesus told the story of the banquet with these words:

“Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.’ So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.” (Matthew 22:9-10, nlt)

This is so important, that we've created a way for you to be reminded of this. It's called an “Impact List” and it looks like this. It's a prayer card, really. But it has a place for you to write down the names of three of your neighbors; they could be next door to your home, or to your office, or next door to your desk or locker at school. But write down the names of three people that you will begin praying for, and when the opportunity arises, you will invite them to church.



Neighboring is so important to us that, from now on, these impact cards are going to be a part of every small group. Every small group will be invited to pass out these cards, and then to hold each other accountable every week for how we are praying for our neighbor, how we are being a blessing to them, interacting with them, and inviting them.

So in a moment I'm going to ask our guest services folks to come and pass these out to you – they will pass them up the aisle and I'll ask you to take a card, fill it out, and begin praying.

But before we do that, let me close with this illustration. Mark Russell in his book called *Missional Entrepreneur* tells of a study that was performed on two different missionary teams that were going to the country of Thailand. Both teams went in

and established businesses as their means of getting into the country. But after that, the two teams had very distinct strategies that they used to reach others. This study wanted to see what would be the results of the different strategies. One team's strategy was to go to Thailand, start a business and focus on *blessing* the people there. They would just get into the culture and find ways they could bless and help people and serve them in tangible ways. They were called "the blessers." The next group went into Thailand and started a business, but their strategy was to focus on getting converts through the business. They went in with the plan to convert as many people as possible to Christianity. This group was known as "the converters."

This study followed these two different groups for five years. Do you know what the results of the study were? The study found that the blessers had a far greater social impact in their area than the converters. But even more amazing, over the five-year period, the blessers had 50 times as many conversions as the converter group. For every two converts by the converters, there were 100 converts by the blessers! The study found that the blesser group not only outperformed the converters by having a huge social impact and made life better for the people in practical ways, they had a *50 times* greater impact in bringing people to Christ!³

I'm confident that as you and I learn and practice how to neighbor, and we keep our motives right, God will create opportunities for us to make introductions and invitations, and we will see people enter into personal relationships with Jesus Christ.

Stand please (*worship team come up*). Please receive this blessing from Romans 15:13...

"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

... (And I would add) to be a blessing to your neighbors.

Let's sing, and as we sing, ushers – please pass out the impact list cards and would you please take one?

³ <https://livewithauthenticity.wordpress.com/2015/02/05/blessers-vs-converters/>