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Love Your Neighbor: Won't You Be My Neighbor
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Well, a week ago Green Bay Packers rookie, running back, Aaron Jones garnered significant media attention. It wasn't for what he did on the field, but it was what he did off the field. He came off the plane and he saw an elderly woman standing there and she had nobody to help her and she had no way to transport herself to her destination, and so he jumped in. He got a wheelchair, and he got her to her destination. Of course, along the way, somebody grabbed their phone and caught it, they uploaded it online and then it went viral and then the media caught it and they termed him a Good Samaritan. We're all familiar with this term and I'm personally as a Bears fan, Chicago bears fan offended that they termed a Packers fan a good ..., but I'm going to let that slide today. It's okay, and it's become common vernacular for us to talk about a random act of kindness, right? So if you look on Google and you go on Google News and you put in the keyword good Samaritan, you'll get hundreds of articles that that shared the same narrative of an act of kindness, but I want to ask this question today is being a good Samaritan, is being a good neighbor embodied in the idea of one simple act or one act towards a random stranger? Stacy in our video said this, she said, being a good neighbor means going deeper than a polite hello. Knowing your neighbors adds another layer to life. It requires risk and commitment, but it's worth it.

I want to step into the layers of life today. Jesus was the originator of the phrase Good Samaritan, and it's in a parable that he told in Luke chapter 10. The story that is built around a question that your booklet asks in the very first week, and it's this simple question. Who is your neighbor? We're going to look in the context of scripture because it's set in a larger conversation, so I actually want to walk verse by verse through this scripture. It starts in Luke chapter ten, verse 25, and it says this...

²⁵ *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

So a lawyer or an expert of the law, it says, stood up. So as we look at the form of rabbinical teaching, a teacher would sit down and a student would stand up around them or a disciple would stand and would listen, and then would recite back, but this is a different moment. The lawyer stands back and he doesn't stand to learn, but he stands to test Jesus. And here's how Jesus responds in verse 26

²⁶ *"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

So Jesus answers a question with what? With a question. And I find this really interesting. I think this is pretty cool because in the rabbinical form of teaching, the highest form of teaching was question asking. And so Jesus responds by asking a question and I think it poses a question for us today, and that's this. When you share your faith, do you give more answers or do you ask more

questions? Because Jesus, he asks all kinds of questions and he models it for us right here. And here's how it's answered in verse 27, he says,

²⁷ “*‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*”

Pastor Heather referenced this idea, a number of weeks ago, that twice a day Jews would, they would recite a summation of the whole law. And so the lawyer stands up and he answers the question by reciting Jesus summation of the law. And it's interesting if we take just a moment to look at that because first is given love God, right? It's a reference back to Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4 and 5. And then there's love your neighbor second, which is a reference back to Leviticus 19:18. But when you look at the canonical order, they're actually backwards. Jesus flips them because he understands that we are made in the image of God and everything flows out of our love and worship to God. That's how it works. You love God. You find joy, you find peace in him, and then the outflow comes and so it's not love God and love your neighbor. It's not, the second command isn't an addition, but it's actually an outflow. It's a result of the first command. And so you love in response, you love others in response to what God has already done in you. We love our neighbor. Jesus says in Matthew 25, he says, whatever you did to the least of these, you have done unto me. What's he saying? The way that you love others, that's how you love me.

A couple of days or a couple of weeks ago, the kids had the day off of school, so we did a little overnight trip and you know, parents that when you get away, one of the most hairy moments is when you're trying to get out of the house. When you're trying to pack the car, you're trying to pack the van, you're trying to get the kids going, you're trying to keep the house in order and that moment is a little bit stressful isn't it? And so we're in that moment and the kids are doing this and in the middle of this, when my blood pressure's rising and my heart, you know, the palpitations are coming. One of the kids says, Dad, I want to help you. Well, all right now we're... Thank you for saying that and let me just say hallelujah and I'm just going to give him some praise right now because God is good and okay, this is a moment I'm gonna cherish. Thank you for saying that. Here's what you can do help your younger sister out. And so they say, well no, I want to help you Dad, not my sister. So I said, no, I'm not saying you can help me and your younger sister. I'm saying you can help me by helping your younger sister. The way you can help me is to help her. Okay? And we kind of do this don't we? In life, God says, love me and love your..., and we said, no, no, no, no. I'm just; I'm working on you God. He says, no. How you can love me is love that person over there, the person next to you, the person across the road, you go ahead and put some love in their direction, that's how you fulfill my command.

Verse 28. “*You have answered correctly,*” Jesus replied. “*Do this and you will live.*”

He should've just stopped and walked away right here, but he doesn't. It says he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus and who is my neighbor? The lawyer asked the question not to learn, but to be justified. He's saying, who's in and who's out, who deserves my love and who doesn't get it, and Jesus responds with a story and he draws the circle way bigger than anyone could have imagined to the point where it didn't just challenge his audience it was scandalous to his audience. And he starts in the scripture and verse 30 says,

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,

Jesus cast the story in a very familiar place to the listeners; they would know this trek to 17 to 18 mile trek downhill. It's dangerous. It's known by many as, it's a dangerous trek because it's a windy road and it's a slim road and there's drops of 300 feet and more. And you'd go down this road and then there's rocks and there's caves and there's places where thieves and robbers can come out and can do some damage, can bring some blood into the equation. So it says

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

The predictable happened, but they didn't just take his wallet. They stripped him, they took his clothes, they took everything. They leave him to die. He is in a place of desperate need right here.

Verse Thirty One. *"A priest happened to be going down the same road."* A stroke of luck. Right? *"And when he saw the man he passed by on the other side."* If there was one that person you would think that would step in and do something about this. It's the religious guy. It's the guy who's trying to do the work of God, right? He's trying to. And this is the guy that you want, but he does not have compassion driving him. He's not a ride or die guy. He doesn't have loyalty coming out of him towards this person. Let me put it this way. Have you ever been surprised by who did not help you in time of need? Right? You think they're your friend and you know when you're going to get into in a bad place, they're going to come and help you. And then you find yourself in a time of need and they just keep on walking don't they? They just walk right by and it hurts, it's painful and all of us can put ourselves in the situation and the place of the man hurting on the side of the road, can't we?

But what about this? What about the people that you have walked by? What about the hurting people when you reposition yourself, not as the hurting man, but as the priest and people are hurting over here, have you stopped? Have you paused? Have you inconvenience yourself to help those around? It's harder for us to put ourselves in the priest position, isn't it? It's a phenomenon known as illusory superiority. It's a cognitive bias with which we judge ourselves differently from others. Well, it's impossible for most people to be above average. Most people think they are above average, don't they? And we do it in all arenas and areas of life from charitable behavior, we think we're better; to work performance to all different places and studies. Most people overestimate their IQ. In a classic 1977 study, 94 percent of professors thought that they were more proficient than their peers. So just, you know kind of figure out the math there. That doesn't quite work out, right. If 94 percent then well that's the average then and then those that are above it, it doesn't quite work out. The math is in another study 32 percent of employees of a software company said they perform better than 19 out of 20 of their colleagues. We think we are better than those around us, don't we? For 44 years Caps fans thought they were better than those around them, but guess what? Where is my people? This year they are. This does not make my point by the way. I just had this slip in it. How about Ovechkin raising it above his and he let out that warrior cry, right? Ahhhhh, I don't know what he was saying. Praise God. I don't know, but he was so pumped. But there is physical evidence for 44 years they didn't quite live up to their standard and then finally in this one year where the expectations weren't there, it happens. We see ourselves better than we really are.

David Dunning, a psychologist at Cornell who has studied the effect of this decade. He said this; we judge others based on external traits and circumstances, but we judge ourselves based on our intention, our effort, our desire, our agency. We think we sort of float above all these kinds of constraints. Lord, help us, right. God, bring conviction into our soul for the people that we have passed, for the needs that we have walked by for the enemies that we have left in our path behind us and we turn our heads. And Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes Kenneth Bailey talks about the temple service and there were three levels of temple servants and you had the priest and you had the Levites, and then you had wise Jewish layman and that was kind of the order. So the priest was at the top of the scale. They would be the upper echelon of society.

So the priest comes along in this instance and it's more complicated than we think because if the priest were to go to the man, he would become ceremonially defiled. Meaning he would have to go back to Jerusalem. He would have to spend a week to go through a purification right and process. And in the meantime, he would miss out for a week plus in collecting all the tithes and eating tithes and allowing his family to eat and allowing his servants to eat. He wouldn't be able to distribute those things to the poor and those in need. And so this is a complicated decision that has effects on him and multiple layers of people. It's not quite that easy. There are a lot of reasons that he could come up with not to do this. In fact if he steps into this and then he goes and tries to serve at the altar his brethren can make a decision and if they think he is unclean, they can take them out, and they can beat him, they can stone him. This is a dangerous decision that he has to make right here. There are complications, there are problems, there are excuses in this decision. Do you know that whenever there's an opportunity to help a brother, whenever there's an opportunity to lend a hand to a sister or a neighbor or an enemy, there will be complications? There is always going to be reasons why you should not, why I could not, why we did not. There's always going to be excuses that that will halt other priorities in our lives. The priest found him.

Verse 32, *So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*

So the Levite would be an assistant to the priest, right? So he would have been serving at the temple. And then the priest leaves the Levite knows the priest is up ahead of him. So he knows when he comes upon this man that the priest has already evaluated the situation and deemed this unworthy. So he has precedent for excuse, he has a precedent not to engage in the situation and he indulges in that precedent. Imagine if you were to put them on his donkey, took them to the town, then he would have to deal with the priest who is his boss. Okay, why do you, I already made a decision. You knew I was ahead of you and then you did this. So the Levite lets him go, he leaves them behind, he uses excuse, so the priest, the Levite, they passed by, right? And then the audience who's hearing this, they know a third person is coming, remember the order. So they think this, this Jewish layman will be next in process, but Jesus shocks his audience when he doesn't bring the wise Jewish layman on the scene. Instead he brings their enemy. He brings a Samaritan onto the scene. To say that Samaritans and Jews were enemies would be a vast understatement. There was a long and painful history of religious hostility, of political betrayal and cultural differences. To go from Galilee to Jerusalem Jews would take a two mile trek around Samaria so they didn't have to deal with their enemies. And so what does Jesus do? He makes their enemy, the Samaritan, the hero of the story.

Verse 33, *"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him."*³⁴ *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him."*

The Samaritan uses all his available resources. He puts his life in danger. For a Samaritan to come into a Jewish town with a half dead, naked man is not a good look. But the Samaritan steps into danger, doesn't he? He puts himself out there.

³⁵ *The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*³⁶ *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

³⁷ *The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Fascinating, isn't it? The beginning, the man, the lawyer asked Jesus, who is my neighbor? Jesus never answers the question, but instead he flips it upside down and he poses the question back to the men. Which of these three was a neighbor to the man?

John MacArthur said, instead of asking who qualifies to be your neighbor, let's talk about the quality in which you love. If you're even asking the question, who qualifies for me to love? You can't fulfill that commandment. It's not about who qualifies it's about the character of your love.

So how do I neighbor well? Let me just, I'm gonna just toss five practical things to get you prayer storming, if you will, for this summer neighboring series. So if you want to jot these down, go for it.

Number one; don't see somebody as a mission to accomplish, but a relationship to cultivate. When Nina and I first moved into our neighborhood, we were hyper intentional about serving our neighbors. And so I would shovel the walks, I would shovel their stairs, I'd weed in front of other people's property, Nina would bake goods and share those. And then something happened. We had a baby and then we had that baby gifts started pouring in from our neighbors. And honestly, it made us feel uncomfortable because we were trying to be the good neighbors, but we were getting all this stuff. But something happened, right then. Relationships with our neighbors started to transform because true and authentic relationship is give and take, right? And there's a dance there, if you will. And I realized that I had seen my neighbor as a mission to accomplish instead of a relationship to cultivate. I had seen my neighbor as an object instead of the subject.

Number two; share your life. One thing I've learned from the DC Dream Center is that your barbecue is your neighbor's best friends, right? And that neighbor who never has a minute, you know what they'll find a minute if they see ribs are smoking and corn on the cob, this flowing, right? And that's the truth. So, years ago, and we were trying to take neighboring to the next level, we decided to do something. So in the summer we decided let's try to block out most of our Friday nights and that's the whole point in and of itself, like how do you make margin? How do you make time in your schedule to be a good neighbor? Right. But we took our Friday nights and then I would just pull the barbecue from the back around to the front and we just made an

open invite. We bought some extra burgers every week. We just say, hey, whoever wants to swing over. So then our stoop became the hangout in our neighborhood because we just shared life on the porch and that's a point in itself too. For some of us we love to hang out in our backyard or on our back deck. Right. But maybe what if for the summer you just decided, I'm going to try to flip this thing. I'm going to hang out on my front porch and maybe it puts you in a place of intentionality with your neighbors, but share your life.

Number three; live your faith authentically and openly. Years ago, I felt the conviction that I had compartmentalized my faith and I had because I talked differently with people at church than I talked with my neighborhood and in my gym and so I just decided, okay, for 40 days during lent I'm going to take my filter out and I don't mean well, I'll leave it there. I'm gonna take my filter out and I'm just going to be who I am in Christ wherever I go and so even to the point where sometimes I think I made Nina feel uncomfortable. We'd be talking to an agnostic neighbor next door and I just start talking about testimony of God's grace and what he was doing and how he is pouring himself out and the miracles that he was working and Nina's going oh, you know, maybe let's slide into that, like hold on, slow down and. But I just decided, you know, I'm not, I don't have an agenda here. I'm just talking about what's on my mind and what's in my spirit and this is who I am. When we live authentically our faith, it just comes out. And we had a couple of neighbors come to church. We had, I had multiple lunches and conversations with people talking about their hurts and their families. And we had a guy from my gym who started coming and joined NCC. And the Lord blesses boldness when we live faith authentically. I love the way that Brandon Harder says it. He says, you got to step into the awkward to get to the awesome. Sometimes you got to get a little awkward, don't you?

All right, number four; know your map. We were really challenged by NCC missionaries, Tony and Jamie Sebastian, the way that they were so intentional about neighboring. And told a little bit of their story last year, but they would go to the same grocery store at the same time and go to the same line because they were, they valued deep relationship. They would go to the same cleaners, but because they were trying to build relationship and become good neighbors. How are you building those same relationships? They actually recently did a marriage of somebody that they neighbored and then they came to faith and then they actually got to perform the marriage ceremony. I think it's pretty cool. But what are some of the questions you should ask? Do you know the name of your parking attendant? You know the prayer needs of your copy coffee shop barista. The guy who used to cut my hair, it would be like a spiritual counseling session. One simple question can change the course. What can I be praying for you about? That's going to be awkward right there, but the awesome can be on the other side, can't it?

If you open up your booklet that you got on the way in, you'll see a map inside the first chapter that unfolds. Take just a moment to peak at that. We're trying to broaden the circle today about how you see and who you see as your neighbors. You see three different categories. You see a geographic map where you live; you see a marketplace map where you'll work. You see a social map where you play. So, if I could be so bold as to give you some homework, take some time today or tonight or sometime to go through that map and just begin to write down the names of people that you know. And then your homework this week is to just get to know something personal, one thing about that name, about that person, and then that starts to open up the door so then you can learn how to support them. You can learn how to pray for them, how to step in their life. Now if you have a child in NCC kids, you got family homework because they're getting a

separate version on their own, but parents were trying to get this to you. We're trying to set you up to model to teach, to disciple your kids. This is a great opportunity for us.

All right, number five; cross the street. In the past couple of years we've had specific lines that we have tried to cross as a couple. We've been intentional about our relationships with people of other ethnicities. We've been intentional about relationships with single people, about relationships with people who are younger than us, who are older than us. There's a lady that lives across the street. She's an older lady and she's of different ethnicity and different persuasion than we are and she kind of keeps to herself and so when she comes outside instead of saying instead of yelling hello from across the street, instead of trying to have a quick conversation, what do we do? We cross the street. We go over there because something happens when you cross the street, when you step on somebody else's soil, when you step on somebody else's pavement, when you cross the street, you're stepping into somebody else's life and it does something. It pulls your heart out a little bit. We've had the chance to pray with her. We've had the chance to walk with her. We've had the chance with some of her challenges with their mom to walk that journey with her. God has opened up opportunities for us to minister and to build relationship with her. Why? Because we crossed the street.

This passage is bursting with conviction, isn't it? It doesn't allow us just to feel good about our little acts. It forces us into a daily walk with the spirit. I pray that God would help us to ask two questions in our prayers. First, God, will you help me to see, help me to see beyond my inconveniences, help me to see the needs that you have placed around me. Number two, God will you give me an active response? God, help me to cross the street, help me to cross the line, help me to cross the aisle, help me to cross the tracks, help me to cross the river, helped me to cross our boundary. God give me an active response that becomes a moral imperative in my heart and my daily walk with you.

This week we saw a number of high profile suicides, didn't we? People who were hurting on the side of the road, they needed somebody to come across them, to pick them up, to put them on their horse and take them to the inn. Don't tell me that nobody's hurting and your path. God open my eyes to see as you see, to see what other people don't see, and then God give me the strength and the courage to act. I don't speak this message out a judgment on anybody today. I speak it out of personal conviction. You know I was talking about that earlier point we said, you know what? We think we're above average and guess what? We're probably not. We bought into a lie. God convict our hearts. Convict our souls. This is personal conviction for me. I remember when I was younger there was a backdoor neighbor, a guy named Tristan; he was a couple years older than me. One night and he went down to the railroad, went down to the railway and he stepped in front of a train and he took his life and I can still access those feelings of guilt, those feelings of if I would have reached out and become a friend to him, if I would have stepped out and tried to add value or speak value in his life, I wonder if that could have gone a different path, a different direction, and I remember a couple weeks before that and it's weird these little points of guilt and you know I've never talked about this. But a couple of weeks before that, a couple of other kids were were talking about they were calling him weird and they're kind of making fun of him behind his back. I didn't engage in that, I didn't start making fun of him, I didn't do anything. But the priest, he didn't put that man on the side of the road. He wasn't saying anything bad about him. The Levite, he didn't strip him down. He didn't take his wallet. He didn't do anything, but

that's the point, isn't it? He didn't do anything and Jesus decides not to focus on the robber, on the thief. He decides not to focus on the sin of action, but he focuses on the sin of inaction.

Where do we find ourselves in this story? Do we sit here receiving this word, this scripture? These are not my words. These are his words. Do we receive his word today and do we receive it as though we are the lawyer justifying our ways and our actions justifying that, yeah, I agree with that, but I'm on the right path. Maybe we're not on the right path. God, forgive us of our apathy. Push us today, God, I pray. May your spirit bring this scripture to life in my soul, God? Let me lead the way or do we see this as the Samaritan who sees something and he follows God and he takes a directive off his path, inconvenient, sacrificial, in to danger to take care of those who God has put in his path. Bring your conviction in to me God.

So, Lord, I pray right now over us today. I pray over our hearts today. I pray over our minds today. God, I pray that we would not be allowed to stay in a secure or comfortable place today, but I ask that you would do your work in my soul and my spirit today, God, forgive me. I pray for all of those hurts that I have walked past. And God, I pray today that we wouldn't just take your word literally, but that we would take your word seriously and that you would open up our eyes to see today, God, and that you would give us the courage to act. In the name of Jesus, I pray these things. Amen.