

**LOVING
— OUR —
NEIGHBORS**

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

OVERVIEW:

PRACTICING GOD'S LOVE FOR PEOPLE BY
CARING FOR THOSE AROUND US

KEY SCRIPTURE:

MATTHEW 22:37-39

DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS:

LOVING OTHERS

BIG IDEA: Why do we love others? To point to Jesus. "We don't love our neighbors so they will know Jesus; we love our neighbors because we already love Jesus and trust Him. We are called to love our neighbors, even if our neighbors never show any interest in Jesus, because we have made Jesus our highest priority." (The Art of Neighboring, 113)

KEY PASSAGES: Matthew 28:19-20, John 13:34-35, 1 John 4:7-21

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL:

Mama, where do germs come from? Mama, what's inside bread? Mama, how does syrup come from trees? Mama, what's outside space? Preschoolers ask about 463 questions per day on average. I made up that number, but it certainly feels correct - and I bet many of you parents out there can attest. Questions are fundamental to the human experience, and it doesn't take long for them to get deeper and harder to answer: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Who am I?

All of us eventually confront these existential questions at a point in our lives. We all butt up against the reality that we are a "...vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes" (James 4:14). We want to be a part of something bigger, to contribute to something that lasts, to leave a legacy, to make an impression. Sadly, many adults pursue these questions their whole lives and believe as Solomon did in Ecclesiastes, "Absolute futility. Everything is futile" (1:2).

But what if I told you I have the answer? I know who I am and why I am here, and I can let you in on the secret. Actually, it's no secret at all! It's written throughout the whole story of God. As Pastor Steve Dang said, "When we place our faith in Christ, we don't go into ministry, we are in ministry." In other words, when you accept Christ, you accept the mission of God. And God is in the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21) All this means is from the time of The Fall, God has been working to win us back to Him. He did this through Christ, and He has passed this mission on to us. You may have also heard this referred to as The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) or as Mark puts it more succinctly, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." (16:15) The Gospel is simply the Good News about Jesus Christ and what He's done - the message of reconciliation.

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19) If you are a Christian, you are a follower of Christ. And as Charles Spurgeon bitingly said, "Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter." (The Simplest Way to Change the World, 11)

So how do we live on mission? Again, easy. Jesus explicitly told us! "I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35) The answer is love. In fact, when confronted by the Pharisees about what the greatest commandment is, Jesus answers, "to love God and to love others." (Matthew 22:34-40)

John elaborates on this in his first letter, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (4:19-20) Loving God is loving others. Humanity is God's creation, His masterpiece. (Ephesians 2:10) God cares deeply about us and wants His followers to care too. For example, last month, we celebrated our friend's daughter who was having her sixth birthday during the quarantine and was feeling a little down about it. Afterward we received a message saying: "I love you guys. I love how much you love my kids. Thanks for celebrating Hannah today. As much as it meant to her, it meant even more to me. Love you, friends." Caring for the things God cares about is loving Him.

When we are on mission, we get to take part in His story. According to Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." He has uniquely placed and gifted us. You are a masterpiece and a tool with a purpose. He is your purpose.

SHARING LIFE:

How are you living on mission?
How do you like to show and receive love?

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Matthew 28:18-20
What do you think it means to "go and make disciples?"
What is God's promise in verse 20?

Read John 13:34-35
What do you think it means to "love one another?"
How does loving one another show we are disciples of Jesus?

Read 1 John 4:10-12, 19-21
What is our motivation for loving others?
What are specific ways we can show God's love?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

BIG IDEA: We are commanded to love our neighbors, but who exactly are they? What does it mean to love them?

KEY PASSAGES: Matthew 22:37-39, Matthew 7:12, Luke 10:25-37

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL:

What was your favorite Bible story growing up? Maybe it was the story of Noah and all the animals, David and Goliath, Joseph and his very colorful coat, or Jesus walking on water. For me, it was the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). I actually called it The Good “Cemetery,” but hey, I was little. I’m not really sure why it has stuck with me all these years, but I do know that I was drawn to the person who saw another person in need and helped.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus what the greatest command is, the second part of His answer included, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). It may lead you to wonder who your neighbor really is. This is the question the experts in the law asked, Jesus answered by telling the story of the Good Samaritan. If you’re not familiar with this story, the short answer is, “Look around. See someone in need? That’s your neighbor.”

Or, let me put it this way. When Jesus gave us our mission in Matthew 28:19, He said “Go...” The problem with language is that sometimes things are lost in translation. I’ll spare you the whole grammar lesson this English degree holder is craving to dig into, but the long and the short of it is, verb tense. In Hebrew, a better translation is, “As you go...” Jesus didn’t give a command to us to leave where we are and seek out different people, and then tell them about the Gospel (although that may indeed be your calling). He said, “Do the mission as you are living your life.” Your everyday life is the mission field. Love your neighbor.

At Calvary, we talk a lot about our spheres of influence. That is, the people we encounter where we live, work, and play. We are each uniquely placed and gifted to reach a specific group of people. For example, if you asked my husband and I who our neighbors were, we’d give different answers. Sure, we would have some overlap because we live in the same place and have some of the same interests. However, we don’t work in the same place. Our hobbies are different. We have different roles within our families that lead us to encounter different people and have different relationships. Why do I love reading and running? I don’t know. God made me that way. But because of this, I meet people at the gym and the library and book clubs and online reading or running forums and races. My husband who loves cycling and racing remote control cars with our kids also encounters a separate group of people. Ephesians 2:10 really highlights our role in God’s ministry of reconciliation. It may sound a little boring, but as Willis and Clements say in *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, “We will have to view the ordinariness of our lives as significant...(24)”

As a fairly cynical person, it can lead me to think about motives, and you might be thinking the same thing too. “If I pursue my neighbor this way, they’re going to think the only reason I’m friends with them is because I want to spread Jesus. They’ll think I have ulterior motives.” In some ways, yes, but in actuality, not at all. Showing others Christ and His love isn’t an ulterior motive, it’s the ultimate motive. “Ulterior” means something is concealed while “ultimate” is the end goal. As it says in *The Art of Neighboring*, “The ulterior motive in good neighboring must never be to share the Gospel. But the ultimate motive is just that - to share the story of Jesus and His impact on our lives” (102). It’s the difference between, “you are only loving me because you want to push Jesus on me” and “I want to show you Jesus because I love you.”

I find it interesting that Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Alternatively, as the Golden Rule states, “do unto others what you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12). Growing up, I took this to mean the bare minimum or basic politeness. But if you think about it, wouldn’t you want others to go above and beyond for you? For example, I would love it if someone randomly dropped dinner off at my house for no other reason than to show love for me. According to Scripture, that means I should be taking that same initiative for my neighbor!

To take this to its ultimate conclusion, consider the following assertion by John Piper in *Don’t Waste Your Life*. He says, “Love is doing what is best for someone” (33). He argues that the best way to love someone is to show them the “all-satisfying God” (33), and “not to aim to show God is not to love, because God is what we need most deeply” (35). If the ultimate act of loving is to share the all-satisfying God, then I would want someone to do that for me, and therefore I should do that for others.

So, go, friend. Love your neighbor.

SHARING LIFE:

Identify one person in your life from each category: live, work, play?

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Luke 10:25-37

What are some things that stand out to you in this story?

There are two characters in the story we often overlook and deem “not good neighbors.” What are some reasons for this? What are some reasons you might give for not being a good neighbor?

Read Ephesians 2:10

Consider that you are His masterpiece. What are the implications?

How has God uniquely gifted and placed you to carry out His mission?

Read Matthew 22:37-39, Matthew 7:12

What does it mean to you to, “love your neighbor?”

Apply the Good Samaritan story to the Golden Rule. What are some of the ways the Good Samaritan went above and beyond in loving his neighbor?

What are some practical things you can do this week to “do unto others?”

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Challenge: Create an impact list. Identify the three people you talked about earlier where you live, work, and play. Pray for them this week. If you are having a hard time identifying these people, pray God will show them to you.

BIG IDEA: God has strategically placed us where we live, work and play. How are we investing in our neighbors? What small steps can we take towards loving our neighbors in the places where we live?

KEY PASSAGES: Luke 5:27-32, Romans 15:7, Romans 12:13

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL:

When we bought our house many years ago, we had our “had to have” list: good schools, price range, enough room for our family, backyard, and then our “would be nice” list. But qualifications for our neighbors didn’t make either list. As we make our lists, God is strategically placing us where He wants us. Acts 17:26-27 reminds us, “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” We don’t live where we do by accident; God has strategically placed us in our location for a reason. As G. K. Chesterton said, “We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next door neighbor.” Are we stepping into God’s invitation and the opportunities He has for us through our relationships with those who literally live next door?

In the book, *The Art of Neighboring*, Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon challenge their readers to fill out a grid and label the eight houses surrounding their home or apartment, and write down names and stories of as many of the individuals/families as possible. As I filled out the grid, I could write names for six and a few stories for two or three of them, but it exposed how little I know and truly invest in those who live closest to me. So, where do we start?

The first week of the pandemic, my neighbor and I delivered a little goodie bag and a note with our information to every home on our block, inviting them to reach out if they needed anything. And while it felt like such a small step, it was a step. We heard back from several families thanking us for reaching out (helping me add a few more names to my grid!). Combine that small act with consistently stopping and saying, “Hi” when I see people outside, along with an email and/or phone call to check in and the small acts start to add up. Most changes in our life don’t happen with one big moment, instead change comes through many small decisions that add up over time. “Small sacrifices can lead to a miracle. When you give what you have, even if it’s a minute, God can make a miracle.” (*The Art of Neighboring*, 88)

In Romans 15:7 Paul reminds us, “to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Romans 12:13 says, “Seek to show hospitality.” God has strategically placed us where He wants us, and the resources He has placed in our hands are to be used for His glory and to further His kingdom - and this includes our homes! Our neighborhoods are filled with lonely people. Opening up our homes and inviting neighbors in for a meal or for coffee (or social distancing on the driveway) is another small act that communicates, “I see you, and if I see you, then God sees you.” (*The Simplest Way to Change the World*, 51). Good neighboring also includes being vulnerable and receiving help. We shouldn’t manufacture needs, but when we invite others into our spaces of struggle, from needing toilet paper and milk to sharing difficult circumstances in our lives, then like any healthy relationship, there is potential for growth and reciprocity.

The gospels are filled with stories of Jesus eating and drinking with friends, disciples, “tax collectors and ‘sinners’”. Jesus loved to spend time with people over a meal and at parties. In Luke 5, Jesus called Levi to follow Him and Levi threw a big party in his home to celebrate. Levi invited all his friends. Sometimes God invites us to be the hub of our neighborhoods and host the parties, but often He pairs us with others who already have established relationships in the neighborhood. And when we invest in these neighbors, they introduce us to their own spheres of friends.

God has placed us in our cities, in our neighborhoods and in our homes for a reason. Let’s be intentional in our relationships and look for opportunities to reach out, meet, get to know stories and invest in our neighbors! Let’s be salt and light in our neighborhoods, live on mission and take the next small step towards loving our neighbors a little better.

SHARING LIFE:

How many of the 8 neighbors around you do you know? Names? Stories?
What steps have you already taken to love your neighbors?

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Luke 5:27-32

How did Levi respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him?

Why do you think Levi decided to host a banquet for Jesus and invite all his friends? And why do you think Jesus chose to attend it?

How did Jesus respond to the criticisms from the Pharisees?

How do you feel around those who are different from you? Why did Jesus succeed in making Himself at home with “tax collectors and sinners?”

Read Romans 15:7, Romans 12:13

What are we commanded to do?

When have you seen hospitality and acceptance of neighbors done well?

What next step can you take to better love your neighbors?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for each other.

Pray for your neighbors by name.

BIG IDEA: We have a lot of neighbors so who do we invest in? God invites us to pray for our neighbors and for open doors, watch for opportunities, listen well, ask questions and always be ready to share the hope of Christ. In our generation, let's introduce Silicon Valley to Jesus.

KEY PASSAGES: Colossians 4:2-6, James 1:19

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL:

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And when He came, He had a plan. He didn't panic that there were too many people to save and not enough time, in fact He lived His entire life in a very small area of the world. Yet His life and His words have reverberated around the world and impacted millions upon millions of people. He strategically invested in people around Him. He taught to local crowds, traveled with a small group, had twelve disciples who consistently journeyed with Him, and then three whom He pulled even closer.

When we consider investing in relationships in our neighborhoods, it's easy to get overwhelmed with the sheer numbers of people. Instead we should be friendly with everyone and choose to be close to a few.

We are called to "Introduce Jesus" but we are not the ones who change hearts - that's the job of the Holy Spirit. Colossians 4:2-6 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." We are called to pray, look for opportunities, be wise towards those outside the body of Christ and when God opens the door, to share the hope we have in Christ.

In Luke 10:1, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go." Jesus sent the 72 to go ahead and pray for and prepare the towns for the work He would soon do. As we devote ourselves to prayer, let's pray and walk our neighborhoods. If you have a friend who can join you to pray and walk (prayer walk), even better! As we walk our streets, we can pray for the Holy Spirit to soften hearts, for opportunities to meet and develop relationships with neighbors and for wisdom around whom to engage with. God will set open doors before us. One of the first times I prayed and walked, asking for conversation with an unbeliever, I started meeting consistently with an older gentleman who I later found out used to attend Calvary. I was bummed because he was already a believer, but not attending church. Since that time I have watched he and wife start attending Calvary again. It's important to not place expectations around what God will do; pray expectantly that He will work and provide opportunities and don't overlook open doors because they weren't what we were expecting.

As the Spirit guides conversations and opens up opportunities, we can begin to pray specifically over a few people, focusing our prayers and connections around them. Luke 6:12 tells us that Jesus spent the night in prayer before He chose His disciples; we would be well advised to follow suit asking for the Spirit's guidance on who to focus on.

Jesus asked a lot of questions, in fact, He asked a lot more questions than He answered. Instead of proclaiming the answers, we are invited to ask questions and listen. Good listeners build trust with those who are speaking. As we listen, it's important to focus on the speaker's words and not be formulating what we will say when they take a breath. We can ask about their faith perspective or background and their thoughts about church. And yes, if and when they ask for our perspective, share it. But trust God and His timing.

I love the story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus with the disciples in Luke 24. Jesus asked open and deep questions, and finally explained the Scriptures to them. But first He gave them opportunity to pour out their hearts and emotions and listen well before explaining the Scriptures. People are lonely and are craving connection, so let's be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." (James 1:19)

We love our neighbor by praying, listening and looking for opportunities to ask questions, and in time, sharing the Good News we have in Christ.

SHARING LIFE:

What is your experience with prayer walking?
Who do you know who is a good listener? What can you learn from them?

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Colossians 2:4-6
What are Paul's instructions in this passage?
What are some practical ways we can learn to devote ourselves to prayer?
Are there specific people you are investing and praying for?
What would our conversations look like to always be full of grace and seasoned with salt?

Read James 1:19
What are James' instructions in this verse? Which of these is hardest for you?
What next step can you take to better love your neighbors?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for each other.
Pray for opportunities with your neighbors this week.

BIG IDEA: Loving your neighbor does not just include those who are easy to love . What do we do when it's hard? How do we love those we don't get along with?

KEY PASSAGES: Matthew 5:43-45

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL:

Jesus is really good at taking an issue to the extreme, am I right? Did that guy take your coat? Well, give him your shirt too! (Luke 6:29) Did you think about that woman with anger? You just killed her in your heart! (Matthew 5:21-22) You think you are following the Law? YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE LAW!

I'm pretty much a recovering Pharisee myself, so when God brought my attention to this verse, it really grabbed me: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-45, emphasis added)

As believers – especially if you grew up in the church – the phrase “pray for your enemies” has become so mundane and overused, it hardly means anything anymore . But in true Jesus fashion, He isn't really referring to our general enemies (e.g. terrorists, the opposing political party, someone with different beliefs than you) . If you think about it, it's pretty easy to pray for these nameless, faceless generalizations. Jesus is always about the heart issue. He makes it personal. He makes it real.

We all have a person in our lives that makes us cringe when we see his name pop up on our phones . We all have a person that ties our stomachs in knots when she is brought up in conversation . We all have a person who causes physical exhaustion at the very thought of an interaction with him . Jesus is talking about this person.

Friends, I'll be real with you . I don't want to pray for that person in my life . “My person” has held that honor for 15 years . She has hurt me deeply and is generally hard to interact with . And frankly, I'm sure I'm not the only one whose “person” she is. I have prayed for her and prayed for our relationship for 15 years. It has been exhausting . It has caused great sacrifice on my part, in my heart, with my time, and with my other relationships . I don't want to waste good prayer time on her anymore. I want God to remove this relationship from my life!

As believers, we are called to be like Jesus . This includes seeing people the way He sees them . This includes all people . This includes my person . For this reason, I believe He placed on my heart to pray that I could see my person the way He sees her.

Do you know who was amazing at this? King David . I'm not saying go read all of 1 and 2 Samuel – actually, yes I am, you'll thank me later – but basically the entirety of 1 Samuel is King Saul actively and emphatically pursuing the death of David . He even launches his spear at David with the intent of impaling him...on two separate occasions . Do you know how David responds? He doesn't . I mean, yeah, he runs and hides safely waiting for the Lord to raise him up at the right time even though was given several opportunities to kill Saul . He always defended Saul as the Anointed King of Israel even though he was a sinner who fell away from the Lord . He sincerely wept and mourned at the news of Saul's death . And he treated Saul's remaining family literally as his own when he came into power (extremely counter-cultural and politically dangerous at that time) . In fact, he didn't treat Saul as an enemy at all. He was a man who truly understood the heart of God. My own experience pales in comparison.

So what has been the result of my conviction? I'm not going to tell you this relationship has been healed completely . In fact, sometimes it seems for every step forward, we take two steps back . However, I do have a renewed heart and attitude toward one of God's creatures . I have found relief from the 15-year burden I've been carrying . And I've had the opportunity to point back to Jesus in so many ways. For example, a few weeks ago I was told I was being “too nice” regarding my relationship with “my person” . Am I being too nice? Maybe . It does look weird, but the Bible is full of references about believers looking strange to others: John 13:34-35, John 17:14-15, Romans 12:2, 1 John 2:15-17, 1 Peter 2:11-12, Matthew 5:46-48.

And to add perspective, was Jesus being too nice when He left paradise to come to Earth? Was Jesus being too nice when He innocently endured torture to the point of death? Was Jesus being too nice when He took upon Himself the wrath of God and sin of the world for our sake? That would be putting it mildly.

By praying to see my enemies the way God sees them, I'm reminded that they are His creation, wholly and dearly loved, worth the same sacrifice He made for me . I'm no better than they are and I need Him no less than they do . This is not an easy task . I know my heart is very hard . However, I'm convinced this is the first baby step to becoming more like Christ . I challenge you to pray your eyes will be open toward your enemies, to see them the way Jesus sees them.

SHARING LIFE:

Who is “your person?” (This is for reflection purposes. Only share if you are comfortable.)

What are ways you can show love to your enemy?

Do you have a redemption story about a relationship with an enemy?

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Romans 12:2 (NLT suggested translation).

Has there ever been a time in your life where someone noticed how you were different from the customs and behaviors of this world? How did you respond?

How can God “change the way you think?” (Romans 8:5-6)

Read Romans 5:6-11.

What sticks out to you in this passage?

What are the implications of this passage if we are to reflect Christ?

Read Matthew 9:9-11, Luke 6:15, Ephesians 2:16.

Consider how two apostles who were moral enemies, (Matthew, a tax collector and traitor to the Jews and Simon the Zealot, a hyper-loyalist Jew) could sit at the same dinner table together.

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for each other .

Challenge: Pray for “your person” every day this week . Consider the following quote by Mother Theresa: “I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that he will guide me to do whatever I'm supposed to do, what I can do. I used to pray for answers, but now I'm praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things.”

BIG IDEA: James 1:27 reminds us that “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” Orphans and widows were part of the marginalized society in Jesus’ day. How do we love and care for those who are marginalized in our society? Jesus shows us how to love them through His interactions with the Samaritan woman in John 4.

KEY PASSAGES: John 4:1-42

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL:

For the past two and a half years my daughter and son-in-law have been on a foster journey. As foster parents, they have had eleven kids rotate through their home. Each child comes with their own backstory and trauma; each child is seen and deeply loved by God. Nicole & Kaleb’s goal is to love them well for the time that God gives them and then release them when God says to let go. I am in awe watching them love and parent these kids, but I wasn’t prepared for the ways that these kids would also break my heart.

Often, we find it easy to talk about the idea of loving the poor and needy and those in the fringes of society, but when we choose to enter in and actually serve and love them, it looks nothing like a Hallmark movie. Life is messy but God can bring beauty even in messiness. It begins with a name and a story. Once someone becomes more than their label: homeless, foster kid, poor, refugee, etc. and we learn names and stories, everything changes. We see how we are all broken in similar ways, and that we all are humans with the same needs, wants and desires.

Jesus came to reach and love everyone, but He had a special love and tenderness towards those whom society overlooked and deemed unworthy. Throughout the gospels, Jesus looks for those that others overlook. He stops, asks questions, listens and loves the sick, the poor, women, children, all those that others just walked by. Jesus shows us in His encounter with the Samaritan woman how to love those on the fringes of society.

Jesus and His disciples came to the well “in the sixth hour”, our noon. The Samaritan woman coming to the well at noon leads us to conclude she is avoiding interaction with other people. Jesus humbles himself before this woman who had many strikes against her: ethnic background, gender, marital status and life choices . Jesus chose to be vulnerable before her, asking her for water, asking her questions and entered into conversation with her from a place of humility rather than power. The disciples came back and were surprised at whom Jesus was talking with.

Jesus exhibits many of the tools we have discussed earlier in this curriculum as He asked questions, listens to the woman’s story, puts Himself in her space rather than expecting her to come to His, and meets her needs. Her reaction is overwhelming joy as she spreads the good news and tells her neighbors to come meet Jesus.

We are the church. We are God’s hands, feet, mouth, His body. He works through His people. He has good works prepared for each of us to do (Ephesians 2:10). But in order to do those good works, we need to humble ourselves, be vulnerable, uncomfortable, confront our prejudices and live out the truth that “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,” refugee or homeowner, poor or rich, foster kid or biological kid, black, Asian, white, or Latino “for we are all one in Christ.” (Galatians 3:28)

As I watch foster kids thrive and grow in their temporary home in Oregon, I’m reminded that God rarely brings health and healing through a few easy steps. In loving kids through their brokenness, bringing them to a stable and loving home, speaking God’s truth over their lives and then releasing them when God says it’s time, our hearts may break yet we trust God is the One writing their stories and healing their hearts. And now whenever I hear the phrase “foster kids” it’s no longer a label but faces and stories: Tony, Char, Lylo, Lorenzo, Katie, Liam, Sebastian, Dominic, Daniel, Roni and Kaleo and my heart swells and my eyes well up with tears and I say another prayer for each of them. I am so thankful for the small piece of their story that I could enter into as their “Nana” for a season. The opportunity to get to know their names and stories and pour God’s love and hope into their stories for a season is worth every tear.

SHARING LIFE:

What groups of people do you feel uncomfortable being around? Why?
What opportunities have you had to share God’s love with the marginalized? What did you learn from those encounters?

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read John 4:1-42

What do we learn about this woman’s backstory?
How does Jesus react to the woman? How do the disciples react to the woman?
How does the Samaritan Woman respond to Jesus?
How have you responded to Jesus’ invitation to receive His living water?
What are some prejudices/labels that you will ask God to help you overcome?
What opportunity is God inviting you to step into?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for each other.

ADDITIONAL READING

Art of Neighboring by Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon

The Simplest Way to Change the World by Dustin Willis & Brandon Clements

Don't Waste Your Life by John Piper

The Master Plan of Evangelism by Dr. Robert E. Coleman