



August 18, 2019

Sermon Series: *The Art of Neighboring*

Overcoming Barriers
Pastor Lisa Kipp

Luke 10:38-42 NRSV

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Last week we kicked off our Art of Neighboring sermon series with the well-known story of the good Samaritan. You know how it goes. A lawyer stands up to test Jesus and asks him a question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds and says (in a nutshell), "Love God ... and love your neighbor." As we teach this story we tend to offer a broad definition of who our neighbor is. They're the people across town, the people we work with, the people along the border, the people at Iambi Hospital in Tanzania, they're the people who are like us ... and especially those who differ from us. Certainly, it is appropriate to understand that all of God's children in this great big world are our neighbors. But what if we take Jesus' command literally. What if Jesus was talking about those who *actually* live right next door to us? Those whose lawns begin at the edge of our property, those we share an apartment wall with, those who live directly across the street or the hallway? What if when Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," he meant our *actual* neighbors?

During this sermon series we're going to take the art of neighboring one step farther (or perhaps one step closer), and encourage you to step out and love your *actual* neighbors. To some of you this might be easy or maybe even exciting. But to many of you, this might sound really challenging. Maybe even down right frightening, or if nothing less, a little bit awkward.



Earlier this week as I discussed the Big Idea Guide at one of my team meetings, one woman declared that she was going to host a neighborhood potluck on Labor Day weekend. Her husband, sitting beside her (who is one of the most generous people I know), instantly sat up uncomfortably. As she explained what she was going to do, he declared that he would be out of town that weekend. So if you're feeling a little uncomfortable about this, please know that you're not alone. In fact, I put myself in that boat with you.

Tucked inside of your bulletin when you arrived this morning you received a half sheet of paper with this chart (see end of sermon). You can take it out if you'd like, but please wait to fill it out until you get home today. This is an exercise that has been created by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, authors of the book, *The Art of Neighboring*. They've done this chart with hundreds of churches and many have jokingly called it, "the chart of shame." Here's the instructions.

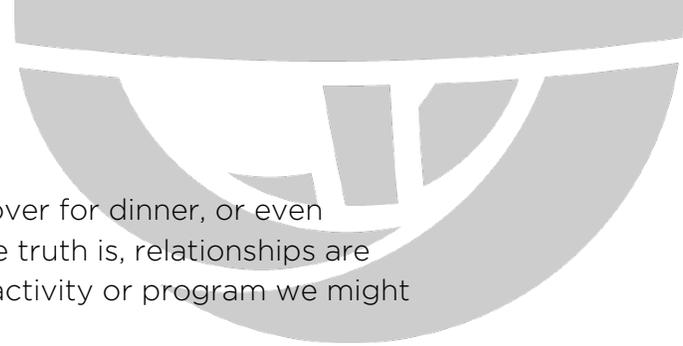
Imagine that the middle box in the chart is your home, and the eight boxes that surround your home are the eight households that God has placed closest to where you live. Whether you live in a neighborhood filled with houses, a rural lot with five acres, or in an apartment building of sorts, try to picture your eight closest neighbors. Then, fill in three subpoints about each neighbor.

- a. Write the names of the people who live in the home represented by the box.
- b. Write down some relevant information about each person, some data or facts about him or her that you couldn't just see by standing in your driveway; information that you've gathered from actually speaking to the neighbor.
- c. Write down some in-depth information you would know after connecting with people.

Somebody once told me that preachers have no secrets because we share so many stories from the pulpit ... so here is my confession. This is my chart. And let me tell you, I'm not proud of it. John and I have lived in our house for 18 years. Most of the neighbors have changed in that time, but they've all been around long enough that I should be able to fill out more of these boxes. Dear friends, this is your assignment for the remaining weeks of this sermon series. We promise to ask you about how neighboring is going for you ... and at the same time, I hope that you will hold me accountable and follow up with questions about how I, or any of the pastors, are doing at becoming better neighbors.



We considered coming up with a list of activities you could choose to do during this series to become better neighbors. We had some great ideas, like trying food



from a culture not of your own, inviting a neighbor over for dinner, or even volunteering with a community organization. But the truth is, relationships are almost always going to be more effective than any activity or program we might create.

Bob Frie, the former mayor of Arvada, a town near Denver, once met with a group of pastors trying to reach out to others in his community. The pastors had a whole list of programs to propose. In response Bob said, “There are a lot of issues that face our community. But the majority of them would be drastically reduced if we just became good neighbors – if we took Jesus seriously when he said to love God, and love your neighbor ... The idea is that when neighbors are in relationship with one another, the elderly shut-in gets cared for by the person next door, the at-risk kid gets mentored by a dad who lives on the block, and so on.”

So what does it take to be a neighbor? And what gets in the way? Jesus knew we would face barriers. In fact, that’s why he draws us closer to sit at his feet and learn.

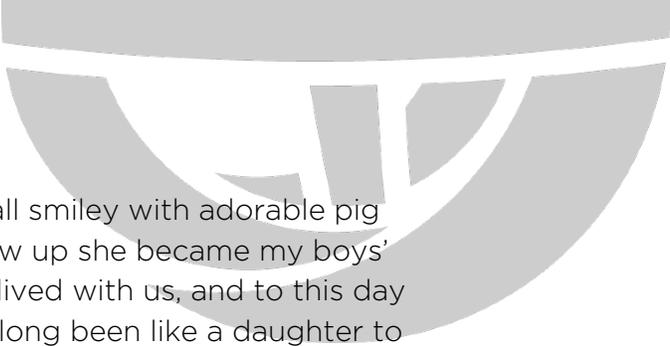
The story of Mary and Martha is probably a familiar one to you. As he is traveling, Jesus stops by Martha’s home. Mary sits at his feet eager to hear all he has to say. Martha is distracted and worried about all the tasks before her as a hostess. Hospitality was important in Jesus’ day after all. But Jesus declares that it’s Mary that has chosen the better task, to sit and listen at Jesus’ feet.

It is certainly easy to be critical of Martha, scurrying about in the kitchen and home, worrying about the things that don’t have eternal significance while Jesus sits in her living room. But if we’re honest, how many of us are trying to live out several callings at the same time ... just like Martha? Martha was trying to welcome others to her home, make sure people were comfortable, and serve them a good meal. We’re busy trying to provide for our families, give opportunities to our children, care for our parents, volunteer in our community or church. Much of our busyness stems from very noble intentions. And we don’t need to disregard those worthy callings or dismiss Martha in order to be able to learn from Jesus.

What if Jesus’ message here is that we need to pause and listen to our neighbors? What if by doing so we see a glimpse of Jesus in our neighbor and realize we’re actually sitting at the feet of Jesus as we listen and befriend? Or what if we realize that taking the time to slow down and listen might actually make a significant difference in our neighbor’s life?



When we first moved into our house in 2001, we were quickly befriended by the neighbors on either side of us. The little kids came with a plate of cookies, and it wasn’t too long before we were having backyard barbecues together. Abby was



one of those little kids, a kindergartener at the time, all smiley with adorable pig tails bobbing on either side of her head. As Abby grew up she became my boys' favorite babysitter. For a couple years of her life she lived with us, and to this day my kids think of her as their older sister, and she has long been like a daughter to me.

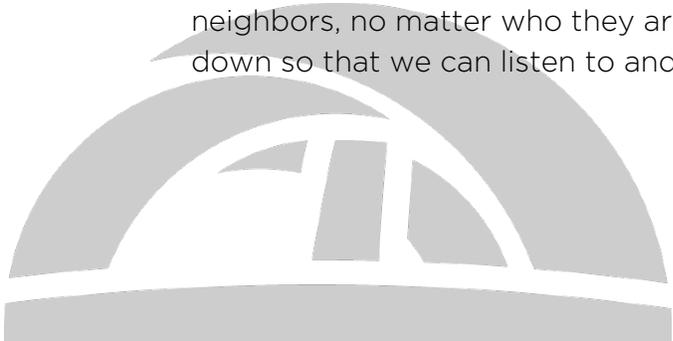
One afternoon after she finished babysitting for the kids when she was about fourteen, she kept hanging around in the garage as I was tending to something that needed to be done. I could sense she wanted to tell me something. And, truth be told, I'm sure I had plenty of other things on my mind and to do list for the day. Eventually I stopped what I was doing, slowed down, and urged her to tell me what was on her mind. Abby started talking, and as she did she told me that she wanted to take her own life. She had a plan. There was a bag of pills under her mattress.

After some prodding and convincing Abby that I needed to tell her mom and we needed to take her to the hospital for help, we made our way to the St. Mary's emergency department. It was one of the most heart-wrenching days in my memory. After Abby was in a safe place and admitted to the hospital, her mom and I went home. Sure enough, under her mattress was a zip lock baggy filled with a frighteningly large mixture of pills.

Obviously, Abby gave me permission to share this story. I can also share that after many long, really hard years of therapy and counseling, Abby is doing well. She works as a para in our school district and I've been told she's one of the best in her building at reaching out to the most difficult kids. She still has days that are harder than others, but most of the time, she knows how to reach out for help and express what she needs. And, she still continues to live out her calling as big sister to my three sons.

As pastors, we don't like to tell stories that make us look like the hero. Frankly, it's a lot easier to make a confession about the lousy neighbor that I am 95% of the time. But I think this story is important to share. Not because being a good neighbor is always going to go this deep, but because it's a reminder that slowing down enough to be fully present to the people God has placed in your life is so incredibly important.

I love that the lesson of Mary and Martha shows up in the gospel of Luke immediately after the story of the Good Samaritan, because we desperately need both in our world. We need to get up and go and do likewise and serve our neighbors, no matter who they are or where they live. But we also need to slow down so that we can listen to and love our neighbors. John Ortberg has often said,





“Love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible. Love always takes time, and time is the one thing hurried people don’t have.”

The art of loving your neighbor is going to take time. There’s no way around it. But like all good intentions, you have to start somewhere. Maybe it’s taking a loaf of banana bread to the lady next door, or leaning over the back fence to have a conversation when you’re mowing the lawn next time, or inviting the man down the hall over for coffee some morning. Dear friends, I urge you to slow down and make some time to be a neighbor. It might be awkward. It might not even go well. But it also might be the beginning of a relationship with deep significance. And who knows, you might be surprised by the ways God encounters you when you mix together the action of the Good Samaritan and the slowing down of Mary. Amen.



How well do you know your neighbors?

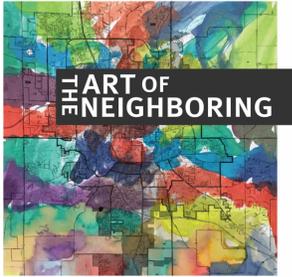
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Then, fill in the three sub points about each neighbor. See the backside for instructions.

a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.
a. b. c.		a. b. c.
a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.

- a. Write the names of the people who live in the home represented by the box.
- b. Write down some relevant information about each person, such as some data or facts about them that you couldn't just see from afar; note information you've gathered from actually speaking to your neighbor.
- c. Write down some in-depth information you know after connecting with your neighbors.



As we make our way through *The Art of Neighboring* sermon series, do your best to meet your neighbors so that you might come to actually know the people God has placed closest to where you live.



The Art of Neighboring
Aug. 11 - Sept. 18, 2019

Sermon series and exercise adapted from *The Art of Neighboring*
By Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon, Baker Books, 2012.