

# Lent

## WEEK FIVE: NEIGHBORING

THURSDAY, MARCH 18 – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

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Throughout the Scriptures we read that the Christian faith is a 'neighboring faith.' Jesus summarized the 10 commandments as loving God and loving neighbor, and throughout the Old and New Testament God puts special emphasis on how we respond to those around us, as an outpouring of how God responds to us. As we continue on our Lenten journey to Jerusalem this week we are reflecting on God's call to love our neighbor as ourselves and also how God responds to us as a neighbor.

# READ

THURSDAY, MARCH 18

As we continue through our Lenten journey our scriptures highlight God's character of merciful love and justice, and God's command to love in the ways He loves. Before you read the following verses pray for the Holy Spirit to befriend you in your reading and teach you from these passages. And as you read these passages, notice the ways that our gracious God is teaching and leading you.

Mark up the passages below as you read them:

- UNDERLINE** any words that relate to the law
- BOX** any words or phrases that relate to loving a neighbor
- ★ After you've read the passages once, read them again slowly – maybe out loud – then **STAR** one word or phrase that really seems to capture your attention at the heart

## LUKE 10:25-37

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

<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b]"

<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: "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. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii[c] 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.'

<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

## ISAIAH 58:6-9

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—

when you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

<sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness[a] will go before you,

and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

<sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,

with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

## I JOHN 4:16-21

<sup>16</sup> And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. <sup>17</sup> This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

*These questions are meant to help you reflect on the texts and apply them to your life. As you read through the texts know that the Holy Spirit is working within you. The Bible is not just a collection of pages but a living book since the Holy Spirit is working in and through it. So as you reflect seek to discern what the Holy Spirit might be teaching you through these passages.*

1. In Luke 10 the expert of the Law asked about eternal life and Jesus responded by telling him a story about a Samaritan sacrificially loving an enemy (the Jewish people and Samaritans were enemies). Why do you think Jesus didn't give him a straight answer to his question in verse 25? What was the law expert missing about the law and eternal life?

2. The word neighbor in Greek means 'whoever is near you.' What was the definition of neighbor for the priest and Levite that allowed them to not stop to help? What is Christ's definition of being a neighbor (verse 37) that the Samaritan fulfilled? How does Christ's definition of being a good neighbor challenge or encourage you?

3. What strikes you about the 'fast' that God has chosen for his people in Isaiah? What parts of that fast are neglected by you personally or by the church as a whole?

4. Is the love discussed in our passage from 1 John an action or a feeling? What does this tell you about love?

5. How can we love others more according to 1 John? What are some ways we can apply the message of love in this passage to our thoughts and actions this week?

# PRAY

FRIDAY, MARCH 19

Our scriptures remind us of God's love and mercy, and this leads us to a new response to our neighbors. One way that we can love our neighbors is to pray for them regularly. Adele Alberg Calhoun wrote that *"Intercession (prayer for others) is one of the ways God invites us into the heart of the trinity. As we keep company with Jesus through intercession, we begin to see the world and the people in it from his perspective and heart. Increasingly we will long for the same things He longs for."*

So, intercessory prayer is a way that we begin to love what God loves and it is also a way we invite God to intervene in our lives and the lives of others. Intercessory prayer can be discouraging if we feel that God is not answering our prayers, yet another perspective is that we may not always be looking for God's answers as well. So as we pray we are also challenged to be attentive. Tim Keller encourages intercessory prayer by writing: *"as we pray, God will either give us what we ask for or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knew."* Below are some tips about WHO we could intercede for and HOW we could intercede for them.

## Tips about WHO to intercede for:

1. Pray for people you have been concerned about or who have come to mind over the past week.
2. Consider interceding with a newspaper or new site close by. Pray for those involved in the stories of the day and intercede for them.
3. Intercede for those in need at the church. Use the power of prayer updates as a daily guide for intercession.
4. Pray for the neighborhoods of West Seattle, and around the area, that God would bring justice and mercy, that God would bring light in the midst of darkness, and that God would lead people to His love in Jesus Christ.
5. Pray for your enemies: both immediate enemies around you and enemies around the world that seek to do violence and evil. Do not just pray that they would turn from their evil, but pray for their thriving and their families thriving, that they would find goodness, and mercy, and grace. And ultimately find God.
6. Pray for different parts of the world. Use a map or a guide such as Operation World ([www.operationworld.org](http://www.operationworld.org)).

## Tips on HOW to pray:

1. If you are having a hard time knowing what to pray, pray scriptural blessings over people. A favorite is Numbers 6:24-26: "May the Lord bless you, keep you, and make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace." Other blessings include: Psalm 20:4, 67:1, Ephesians 3:16-17, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:11, 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

2. Journal about how you are interceding on behalf of others. When we pray, too often we just ask and forget to look for how God may respond. Track who you are praying for and be on the lookout to see how God will act.
3. Invite others to pray with you on behalf of these needs through technological means such as FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom.
4. Consider praying as Paul teaches in Philippians 4:6 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.”

#### FOR FAMILIES:

At dinner or the end of the day, think of someone or something the family could pray for. Write the person and/or concern on an index card and pray for the concern together (if having a hard time, pray a Biblical blessing). Keep the card and the next time you pray write another concern to pray for on another card. Pray for the new concern and then pray for the concern on the first card. Every time you pray together, think of new concerns and write them down, and then pick one or two old cards to pray for. This practice helps children (and adults) to remember prayer concerns, continue to love others by praying for needs, and also to praise God when answers to prayers have happened.

# REST

SATURDAY, MARCH 20

From the very beginning in Genesis we read that God has knit a rhythm of work and rest into the very fabric of the universe. God worked for six days and rested for one. In the same way we are called to work diligently and well but also to rest and receive refreshment. We were not created to be human doings, but human beings, who work but do not find our ultimate worth in work. Taking a day to rest, relax, and be refreshed reminds us of this. As you rest today be encouraged by God's empathy and grace towards you in Jesus Christ, and approach the throne of mercy with confidence!

## HEBREWS 4:14-16

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[f] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

# WORSHIP [GATHER]

SUNDAY, MARCH 21

*If your group gathers on Sunday then use the "Gather" section (Wednesday) for your group time together.*

*Our theme in worship today is learning from Christ as a good neighbor and being a good neighbor – take a few notes for yourself during the service that will help in the next few days.*

Where did Jesus really get my attention in the worship time today?

What stood out to me in the sermon?

What did the Holy Spirit call to mind during the reflection time after the sermon?

Who do I want to remember to pray for in this coming week?



# PRACTICE

MONDAY, MARCH 22

## THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

Below are some ideas to practice 'neighboring' in our families, our church, neighborhood, and city.

1. Every morning for the next two weeks, ask your spouse, roommate, child, friend, or colleague "What can I do for you today?" Then do it. Talk to God about what this is like for you. What do you see about yourself?
2. Practice the service of guarding the reputation of others (Titus 3:2). Refrain from gossip or slander in all its forms (both spoken and on social media) and defend another instead. Voice what is praiseworthy instead of what is worthy of criticism (Philippians 4:8-9).
3. Practice hospitality. Peter urges us to "Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1 Peter 4:9). Paul does the same and even makes it one of the requirements for the office of bishop (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). Even if we can't open up our homes right now, think of a few ways that you could be hospitable to a friend or neighbor and then seek to accomplish those in the next few weeks.
4. Divide a paper into three columns. Above one column write "For Me." Above another column write "For Others." Above a third column write "For God." Review the past week or month. Jot down in each column the things you have bought and done for yourself, others and God. What does this inventory reveal about your life? Take time to read Luke 23. Gaze at Jesus on the cross. What has God given because he loves you? How would you like to see the answers in your column change over the next months? Listen to your longings and God's promptings.
5. Think of an issue concerning justice and mercy that has been on your mind lately. Bring those concerns and ask God to show you His heart for those needs. As you pray, ask God for inspiration and guidance on how to go from prayer to action.
6. Service in the Marketplace: Service to be service must take form and shape in the world in which we live. Therefore, we must seek to perceive what service looks like in the marketplace of our daily lives. At the outset there is the service of hiddenness. Even public leaders can cultivate tasks of service that remain generally unknown. How can you practice the service of hiddenness in your workplace?
7. Think of a ministry or organization that is doing good work in the city. Send a call or email about how you could help them. Talk to your connect group of being of service. If you see a need going unfulfilled, ask God for inspiration and courage to meet that need.
8. Pray for opportunities to be a witness of the resurrected Christ to those who do not know him. If opportunities arise, seek to share humbly and honestly of the hope that you have in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15).

*Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, Adele Calhoun, and The Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster*

## FOR FAMILIES- PRAYER WALK THE NEIGHBORHOOD

It could be a fun and helpful exercise to introduce a prayer walk to your family. This would involve choosing a few areas in the neighborhood (a school, a corner, a park, certain streets) and just praying God's blessings and peace over those areas. Pray God would bring help and goodness to the people in that area, that God would guide and lead, that people would know the goodness of God in Jesus Christ, that there would be justice and mercy, etc... This could be a good bonding exercise for the family and instill a different way of looking at neighborhoods and the city.

# REFLECT

TUESDAY, MARCH 23

*Today is for reflection in Jesus' presence – a chance to recall the past week and regather for the next week of the journey. You can use these questions for Connect Groups or for personal study.*

## Read Luke 10:25-37 again

1. What strikes you as you read this story again? Any thoughts or questions?
2. What does this passage reveal about the character of Jesus?
3. Who has been a good Samaritan to you in the past? What makes a good Samaritan really good?
4. To whom can you be a good Samaritan to this week?
5. Where has Jesus met you with grace in your journey this past week?

6. What ongoing prayers do you carry into the next week of Lent?

O God, I want so to belong; teach me to accept.

I want to be close; teach me to reach out.

I want a place where I am welcome; teach me to open my arms.

I want mercy; teach me to forgive.

I want beauty; teach me honesty.

I want peace; show me the eye of the storm.

I want joy; show me the way of deeper commitment.

I want life; show me how to die.

-Ted Loder, *Guerillas of Grace*

# GATHER [RECONNECT]

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

*If your group met on Sunday take the opportunity on Wednesday to check in with your prayer partner(s) midweek, supporting each other in this journey.*

## Reconnecting

Share a time when you either helped a stranger in distress or were helped by a stranger when you were in distress. What happened?

How did your Lenten practices or prayers go this past week? Did anyone choose a special practice for Lent?

Each week we will come back to the question of what it means to live as people of faith in Jesus. This week, how would you answer that question? Make a note so you can follow your progression of thought and practice over this Lenten journey.

## Read Luke 18:25-37

What struck you in your own reading and prayer this past week on this passage? What struck you from Laurie's sermon on Sunday?

In verse 25 the scripture states that the expert of the law stood to test Jesus. How was he tested by Jesus? What was the expert's goal and what was Jesus' goal? How are you convicted by this passage?

Tin Keller wrote that "to be a good Samaritan you firstly need a good Samaritan" and the ultimate good Samaritan is Jesus. Reflect on this quote for a moment. How does service look when it is done out of righteousness (wanting to be a good person, etc.) and when it is done out of grace (loving because we have been loved)? How can we stay grace centered when serving others?

What are some ways that you feel God is calling you to be a good neighbor? What is a way your connect group could work together to be a good neighbor in Seattle and beyond?

What questions or convictions surface from this story as we continue through this Lent journey?

## Faith and Practice

Faith is the willingness to submit ourselves to God's call and God's purpose for us. What is one place in your life that we can pray for humility and willingness this week?

**Close out your time as a group in prayer for one another.**