

**Message Series: The Art of Neighboring**  
**“Not Always Better to Give than Receive” Matthew 26:6-13**  
**Scott Burgess August 30, 2020**

How great would it be to have Jesus as your next-door neighbor? Think about it. Getting ready to host a neighborhood BBQ and see rain coming? Simple. Just ask Jesus to calm the storm for you (Matthew 8:23–27). If I find myself running out of wine late in the day, I could just grab some pitchers of water and ask Jesus for a little help (John 2:1-11). And then, when all the guests are gone and He and I are sitting and watching the game together, and Michelle comes in to complain that I’m not helping to clean up, Jesus would explain it to her. “Michelle, Michelle, you are worried and upset about many things,<sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Scott has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from him.” Luke 10:38-42

We all have neighbors. Even if you live on a big farm, with hundreds of acres, you still have neighbors; they are just a little farther away. This is the final week in our four-part series on “The Art of Neighboring.” In the first week, Doug talked about simply getting to know who your neighbors are. Did you work on that? Have you filled out your neighborhood tic-tac-toe board? And remember that this isn’t a scavenger hunt. The object of the board isn’t to see how quickly you can fill it out, stick it in a drawer and then forget about it. In your mind expand the board down the street, around the block. I use the Notes App on my phone to remember the names, children and pets in my neighborhood.

In the second week Doug talked about time: creating the time to talk to a neighbor, to get to know them, to help out. I have one neighbor down the block who has a senior citizen living across the street. I’ve noticed that every morning as she goes out to pick up her newspaper, she takes the time to pick up his paper, walk it up the driveway and put it on a ledge on his front porch. It’s a little thing and doesn’t take a lot of effort – but it’s beautiful to see somebody take just that little bit of time to give to somebody else.

Last week Linda shared about fear. Fear can come in many forms. The fear of dealing with neighbors that are different. The fear that you can get drawn into something you don’t have time for. The fear of being judged or grouped in a stereotype. It could just be the fear of embarrassment. How many of you have a neighbor that you have known for years? You say hi, maybe exchange a few pleasantries. You might even know the name of the dog...but you can’t seem to remember their name! And darned if you are going to ask because that would just be embarrassing. I must admit; that has been me. I have one neighbor that I had known for several years. We would pass each other walking our dogs and say hi. But I couldn’t remember what her name was. And what was worse, she knew my name. How could I let her know I forgot after so many years? But one day I did just that. I let her know that I felt bad about it but asked her to remind me what her name was. She seemed to take it well and told me her name. And the funny thing was that I realized that it didn’t click at all. Obviously, I had never known her name. Now when I see her it feels so much better to be able to pass by and simply say, “Good afternoon Amy.”

Why is this discussion on neighboring so important? Our faith is built on relationships. Matthew 22:36-40 reads,<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘Love

your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>[b]</sup> 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Today we are going to talk about reciprocity. The Art of Receiving. In a word, the Art of Neighboring is really about relationships, our relationship with our neighbors.

A relationship should not be one-sided but should be based upon each side having a part. Last week Linda mentioned the book, “The Art of Neighboring” by Dave Runyon. There is also a four-part video series and study guide on RightNow media with Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak. The videos are short, between 6 and 11 minutes each, and provide some great insights. In talking about receiving, Dave states, “If we are always serving, the relationship is stunted. Real relationships are give and take.” That’s why growth groups are so important. They allow us to share our thoughts, and receive what others have to share.

As with everything else that He did, Jesus was a great example for the art of receiving. It has been mentioned numerous times, that Jesus ate his way through the Gospels. I did a little research. There are at least 14 instances where Jesus ate, or most likely did, in the Gospels. And sometimes Jesus provided – feeding the 5000 or supplying the miraculous catch with the disciples. At other times the meal is provided to him – like at the house of Mary and Martha. But in each case Jesus allows others to serve Him.

There is another story of Jesus receiving that is told in multiple gospels. Here is the version from Matthew 26, verses 6-13

### **Jesus Anointed at Bethany**

<sup>6</sup> While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. <sup>8</sup> When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. <sup>9</sup> “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

<sup>10</sup> Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>11</sup> The poor you will always have with you,<sup>[a]</sup> but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup> When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. <sup>13</sup> Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

I read this passage using one of the study tricks I learned from Rick Warren in “40 Days of the Word.” As I read the passage, I inserted myself into different players in the scripture. The one that was easiest for me to relate to, was the part of a disciple. Righteous indignation! The disciples, perhaps trying to show their ministry to the poor and the oppressed, don’t consider the two most important people in the story. It’s always difficult to put ourselves in the Jesus role. Jesus sees her act as symbolic of the preparation for his burial. It was yet another in a series of efforts to explain to the disciples what was going to happen to him – soon. In the first two verses of Chapter 26 Jesus tells them, “When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.””

Putting oneself in the woman's place is also not easy, mainly because we know almost nothing about her. Some think she might have been Mary Magdalene or Mary, Martha's sister. But wouldn't she have been named in that case? Maybe she was a prostitute, another widely held belief. No matter who she was, Jesus must have affected her in some way. Perhaps his teaching, his kindness or his holiness. Maybe some of each. She took something that was more than she could afford to throw away and used it to give Jesus something as a thank you, an offering. She wanted to bless him as Jesus had blessed her. Jesus recognized and accepted that. He knew what it meant to receive and understood why people want to give.

We serve because we want to share our faith with others. We give so that others can see Jesus through what we do. And we get joy out of those acts of giving. Shouldn't we want others to feel that same joy?

As we learn how to be better neighbors, it is important to accept being on the receiving end sometimes. How do we do that?

1. We ask about things that interest them. There were a couple of examples in the RightNow Media video that I mentioned earlier. As I watched I realized that I had one of the same types of experiences. One of my next door neighbors recently put in a fairly extensive vegetable garden with posts, gates and screen to keep out the critters. Now I have no real desire to grow my own veggies, but while talking to them, I could see how interested they were in it and let them show me the garden, and all they had done to construct it and plant it. It seemed to make them happy.
2. It's also important to listen! I'm referring to really listening. Hearing what they say and asking questions about it. Asking good questions helps to show that you really were listening which is important to the person sharing about themselves. The better listener you are, the more likely that people will open up to you. And that can lead to a better relationship.
3. Allow others to serve you sometimes. I'm not talking about becoming a taker. I'm talking about the reciprocal relationship where each side has something to offer. Sometimes people that are receiving from us, want the opportunity to give back in whatever way they can. I'm not talking about evening things up. I'm simply referring to allowing others the joy of giving that we appreciate so much.

Until 2020 and Covid-19, Michelle and I for seven years, shared our backyard by hosting the annual Patio Worship Service and BBQ. We invite a worship band, somebody in the ministry shares a message and then we have a pretty great BBQ dinner. We invite Woodside members, people in the Recovery community that we serve and also people from the neighborhood. We've ranged from 53 to 135 attendees over the years and it has always been a great day. At the end of the event, there are always some people that want to stick around and help out. And while neighbors and Woodside people might ask, it is also often some of the people in recovery that really want to help. It would be easy to tell them they don't have to. We do this to serve in a way that we can. Sharing Jesus and food is a wonderful blessing that we get to give. But I've seen it where people really want to help. They have enjoyed it so much, that they just want to be able to show their appreciation and help out in whatever way they can. Do not get me wrong. It is a busy day and I appreciate the help in cleaning up, but seeing the joy in people getting the opportunity to give back is more important.

Let's pray.

Father God. Thank you for surrounding us with neighbors. As we finish this series, I pray that everybody that has followed this, virtually or live, doesn't stop here. Help us to expand our neighborhood, to build relationships with people throughout our neighborhood. And then let us use that momentum to continue to expand what we consider our neighborhood. From those two streets down, out to Trenton or Kensington, across the nation and on to other countries. Let us learn who our neighbors are by giving our time, by overcoming our fears and through building relationships that can survive. All through the strength and the love that you give us. Amen.