

SPREAD OUT THINK BIG

Week Five | March 18, 2018 | *The Church is the Hope of Our Community*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY:

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone meditating on God's word in Isaiah 58:6-11.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Church is the hope of our community. As the body of Christ, God uses us to share His love with our neighbors.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

As we rely on Jesus and follow His example and teaching, God will use us—His Church—to intentionally engage our community with the love of Christ.

MEDITATE

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?” (1 John 3:16-17)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

As you may know, Oakwood has a free medical/dental clinic called Volunteers in Medicine and a free tutoring/mentoring program for elementary students called Kids' Club. Kids' Club Director Janae Fuller shares the following story of both ministries:

At our school-based programs, one of the school personnel that we tend to have the most face-time with has been the custodial staff for the after-school shift.

As Kids' Club has learned from the very beginning, each custodial staff member has a very particular way things should be done or left, and it has become a communications dance as custodial staff work through completing duties and as Kids' Club Program operates in the midst of those duties.

When to use which room, which restroom hasn't yet been cleaned, how the chairs and tables should be left, sweep the floor, where the trash is to be left (or left untouched), to mop or not to mop, etc...

The goal, of course, is to not only operate a smooth running and effective Kids' Club on the school campus, but to also be a blessing to ALL school staff. If we can find any way of doing that, we will purpose to do so.

One day, while at one of our school-based Kids' Clubs, I had the opportunity to speak with one of the three afternoon custodial staff members. She explained how stressed she was because they were short-staffed. One of their supervisors was out for health-related reasons, and another colleague was sick, so they had a substitute custodian that was still learning.

It became clear that this was a great opportunity to be a blessing and for sure do everything we possibly could to make her job easier and for her not to have to double back and re-clean anything. I began to ask her some specifics on what she'd like for us to do to leave the rooms clean, and what would be the best for them.

As she told me, she looked at my name tag. "I see you sometimes at our school, but not all the time. Do you help with the Kid's Club program here?" I began to explain about Kids' Club, the other locations of Kids' Club, and New Braunfels Christian Ministries. She asked about the locations of the other schools and the Main Campus.

"Oh! I know where that is! It is right behind Volunteers in Medicine!"

"Yes, ma'am. That's right. Volunteers in Medicine is one of our sister ministries."

She then began to tell me her story.

"My husband has been unable to work, and doesn't have insurance. He became sick and needed a place to go for medical care, but we couldn't afford anything. We couldn't pay. My friend told me about Volunteers in Medicine, and so he called and he was able to be seen and get treatment. We are so grateful for a ministry that takes care of good people when they need help the most."

She continued....

"I really like what you all do for the kids at this school. These kids, they need it, you know? I know it is a Christian

program—I am a Christian too. I go to church here in town, and we also do outreaches to help others in need. Help others in need just like you help others in need. For Jesus. We are on the same team, you know. We fight the same fight and we work together for Jesus. You in this program and me in this school as I pray and sweep. And my husband at that clinic. Because sometimes we each need a little help ourselves. “

She smiled and shook my hand, and continued to sweep down the long, empty hallway.

Yes.

We are all in this together.

We are in this together and we are better together. I believe we will limit ourselves if we ever think it is an “us” and “them” mindset. The need is too great and too diverse to answer ourselves alone.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Janae’s story illustrates all three of our main points this week:

1. **WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER – THERE IS NO “US AND THEM”**
2. **IT’S ALL FOR JESUS**
3. **OUR “NEIGHBOR” IS THE PERSON RIGHT IN FRONT OF US**

Let’s dig a bit deeper to explore each of these important truths and their foundation in Scripture...

GOING DEEPER

*+This next section will help show what God’s Word says about this week’s particular focus.
Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week’s biblical truth.*

One day a lawyer asked some questions to test Jesus. During their discussion Jesus confirmed that God’s law essentially boils down to this: “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.”

But the lawyer seemed to look for a loophole. “Who is my neighbor?” he asked.

Jesus responded the way He so often did in such situations; He told a story...

LUKE 10:25-37

This story, often called “The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” is so familiar to us that we might overlook some of its subtler meanings. Let’s try to look at it with fresh eyes.

Our story starts with a man who needs help. Whatever else you might say about him, one factor overrides everything else: he needs help. The man has a need he cannot meet on his own, and without someone else stepping in, he has no way out. *He needs help.*

But someone comes along. A priest! Surely a priest will help. After all, he serves as one of the Jewish people’s representatives before God; his job is integral to the people’s regular worship. He’s a religious man, a respected man, a pillar in the community.

But notice the priest’s response: “When he saw him he passed by on the other side” (Lk. 10:31b, ESV).

The priest *distanced* himself. He went out of his way to avoid this helpless man and his needs. For whatever reason, the priest didn’t want to have anything to do with the situation. Perhaps he was afraid that the bandits who had wounded this man weren’t far away, or maybe the priest just didn’t want the inconvenience of helping. Maybe he had something important to do and didn’t think he could spare the time.

Whatever his reasons, the priest’s response was to put distance between himself and the person in need.

🗣️: *Have you ever seen a need and responded by distancing yourself? Why do you think creating distance was your automatic response?*

Jesus then tells us that the exact same scenario plays out with a Levite—another person whose role was central to the worship of God. In the story, both priest and Levite distanced themselves from the person who needed help.

But along came a Samaritan.

At this point in the story, Jesus’ audience—and especially the questioning lawyer—would have had immediate and deep reactions. When we hear the word Samaritan today, it always has a good connotation because we’re familiar with this story and we’re less familiar with the visceral contempt most Jews held for Samaritans in Jesus’ day. To most upstanding first century Jews the Samaritans were a vile people of questionable ancestry who didn’t understand God, didn’t respect God’s law, and had compromised their beliefs and morals in the ways that mattered most. So, for Jesus’ audience and this lawyer, a Samaritan would be the last person to show up in a story demonstrating what

it means to fulfill God's law by loving our neighbor as ourselves.

But Jesus cuts straight through the prevailing prejudice.

Notice how different the Samaritan's response is from that of the priest and Levite: "...when he saw him, he had compassion" (vs. 33b). The Samaritan's immediate response upon seeing someone in need was *compassion*. There was something in this man—in his heart, in his character—that produced an automatic reaction of concern and desire to help. Compassion was who this man was, deep in his bones. The Samaritan was the kind of person who is ready and eager to help others.

And his compassionate character moved him to action. "He went to him..." (vs. 34). The priest and the Levite distanced themselves from the person in need; the Samaritan did the opposite: he went to him. He drew near. The priest and the Levite avoided; the Samaritan embraced.

🗣️: *When you see someone in need, are you more likely to respond with distance or by drawing near?*

"He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine" (Lk. 10:34). Can you imagine the sight and the smell of the scene the Samaritan came upon? A man beaten, likely bloodied, stripped naked, lying half dead on the roadside. It couldn't have been pleasant. It certainly was messy. But the Samaritan dove right in—into the mess, into the uncertainty, into the complications that are an inevitable part of helping. He met the helpless man's immediate needs immediately. He did his best for this man right then and there.

And the Samaritan didn't stop with that. He provided more substantial help than just a quick fix; he did more than put a "band-aid" on the man and his problems. He took the man to a place for rest and healing and "took care of him" (vs. 34).

Think of the inconvenience this must have caused. The Samaritan encountered this victim on the road "as he journeyed" (vs. 33), so we know the Samaritan was going somewhere. He was on his way somewhere to do something. Maybe he was traveling for business, to see family, for a religious event, or for leisure, but whatever the case, he placed another's needs above his own plans. He let his plans be interrupted—and not just for a five-minute stop on the roadside but for enough time to get the man the help he really needed. We know the Samaritan's schedule was significantly interrupted, because Jesus tells us "the next day" (vs. 35) he was still at the inn where he had put the man up and cared for him, apparently through the night.

Q: *How willing are you to let someone else's need interrupt your plans?*

And as if that weren't enough, the Samaritan took the necessary steps for the man's long-term recovery: "he took out two denarii, and gave them to the innkeeper, saying 'Take care of him, and whatever you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'" (vs. 35). This good Samaritan knew that the man in his care needed long-term help; it would take time for the man to fully recover to the point that he could once again care for himself. And the Samaritan—because he was a man of compassion—committed his resources and his reputation to provide not only relief but also development. He gave sacrificially, generously, and wisely for this stranger's long-term good.

That's Jesus' story. After telling it, Jesus asked a question of the lawyer. "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (vs. 36).

I can almost hear the frustration in the lawyer's voice as he answers: "The one who showed him mercy" (vs. 37). I'm guessing this wasn't the outcome he was looking for when he first stood up to "put [Jesus] to the test" (vs. 25). I could be wrong, but I think the lawyer was looking to exclude rather than include, to limit rather than to love.

And I'm fairly certain he was not expecting a Samaritan to be the hero of the story. In fact, you may notice that he didn't even use the word "Samaritan," almost as if he couldn't bear to say it. Instead, he identifies him as "the one who showed him mercy."

And that is exactly the right answer. The one who proved to be a neighbor was the one who showed mercy—the one who acted toward another the same way God acts toward us: with mercy. For God is really the ultimate neighbor, and He calls us to be neighbors who follow His example.

So, how does that happen? What does loving our neighbor actually look like?

Let's look at three truths from Jesus' parable that will help us as we intentionally engage our community—our "neighbors"—as a church.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER – THERE IS NO "US AND THEM"

Our fallen human nature has a tendency to revert to an "us-and-them" mindset. We label, categorize, and stereotype. We assume, presume, and prejudge. It seems the lawyer in Luke 10 may have fallen into that kind of thinking ("Jews" and "Samaritans," "those I have to love" and "those I do not"), and Jesus' story aimed squarely at breaking down those assumptions and categories.

Sometimes this “us-and-them” thinking pops up even when we’re aiming to help. We sometimes create a divide as we serve our neighbors. Sometimes, perhaps unintentionally, we assume the posture of “us” (the helpers) and “them” (the people who need help).

But the truth is we all need help. We all need each other, and we all need the love of God lived out through other people. And sometimes those of us who appear to have the most, don’t see our own deeper needs. If helping our neighbor makes us feel superior, then we see neither ourselves nor our neighbors as we really are. Real love doesn’t leave room for me to think I’m better than anyone else—because I’m not. I am just as much in need of God and His provision as anyone else.

As we, the Church, love our neighbors, our aim should be to always have the attitude and approach of Jesus: we’re all in this together, and there is no “us” and “them”—we’re all just “us.”

IT’S ALL FOR JESUS

The Church has something no one else has. No other group or organization, no institution, no government, no agency—no one else has Jesus. It is only through Him that we can do any eternal good in our community, and He is what we and all our neighbors truly need. It is all about Jesus, and that will never change. That’s why the first part of the greatest commandment isn’t about loving our neighbor; it’s about loving God (Lk. 10:25-28). Love for God and love for neighbor go hand in hand, and ultimately, we don’t have the capacity to love our neighbor unless we are experiencing God’s love for us, loving Him in return, and letting that love overflow to our neighbors.

The Church is the hope of the community because we are the body of *Christ*. Jesus makes the difference, and He chooses to do it through us! We have something no one else has: the promise, the presence, and the power of Jesus Christ.

There’s a verse that beautifully expresses Jesus’ demonstration of God’s love.

Referring to Jesus as “the Word,” the apostle John wrote: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14a, ESV). Eugene Peterson’s translation of this verse in *The Message* really drives the point home: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood...”

God moved into the *neighborhood*. He dwelt among us. He didn’t distance Himself; He drew near. He became a neighbor to us.

And that is what He calls us to do: be true neighbors, draw near, and partner with Him in loving those around us.

OUR “NEIGHBOR” IS THE PERSON RIGHT IN FRONT OF US

The lawyer in Luke 10 seemed to be looking for a category of people he could exclude from the “neighbor” title, for a list of people he didn’t have to love. But Jesus’ story left no room for exclusion.

Our English word “neighbor” comes from the old English root word “nigh,” meaning “near,” and really just means “the one who is near me.” “Neighbor” seems to be the most accurate translation of the Greek word Luke uses to tell of this encounter Jesus had with the lawyer, as well as the Hebrew word from the passage in Leviticus 19:18 that Jesus and the lawyer were discussing.

So, Jesus is telling us: your neighbor is the one who is near you, the person right in front of you, anyone you encounter. There’s no one you can exclude from this list, no one who comes across your path about whom God does not say: “Love this person.”

We have many neighbors: family, friends, co-workers, classmates, the cashier at the grocery store, the waiter at a restaurant—and everyone who lives in our community. If you’re like me, thinking about all the people I encounter every day—all my “neighbors”—can feel overwhelming. How could I possibly love that many people? How could I meet their needs? How can I tackle the really tough problems they face?

Dallas Willard reminds us:

We may never feel adequate to such a life, in view of the depth of need that surrounds us. But it is right and good to understand that we aren’t adequate to love as we should and could! Instead we are to stand with others in the fellowship of disciples of Jesus Christ and under the presence and resources of the kingdom of God.¹

It’s ok that we aren’t adequate to the task of loving our neighbor on our own—because we aren’t on our own. God loves through us and with us. And He’s given us a team to partner with: the body of Christ, the family of God, the Church. God is love, and He is the one who meets people’s needs. HE is adequate to the task! And He allows us to join Him as we all partner together to do His work.

That’s where Oakwood’s community ministries come in: they provide an opportunity for us all to partner together in God’s strength to love and serve our neighbors in ways we couldn’t on our own. Oakwood created a separate nonprofit, called New Braunfels Christian Ministries, to share Jesus’ love through three different ministries: Volunteers in Medicine, Kids’ Club, and the Harvest Food Pantry. These ministries tackle big problems affecting our neighbors right here in our own community.

Did you know...

...between 13,000-25,000 people in Comal County lack health insurance?

THAT'S WHY WE CREATED VOLUNTEERS IN MEDICINE: TO HELP OUR SICK NEIGHBORS GET WELL

...despite the hard work of many fine teachers, hundreds of students in our local school districts still read below grade-level and need extra help after school?

THAT'S WHY WE CREATED KIDS' CLUB: TO HELP OUR YOUNG NEIGHBORS REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

...many children in our community go to bed hungry at night?

THAT'S WHY WE CREATED HARVEST FOOD PANTRY: TO HELP OUR HUNGRY NEIGHBORS BE FED

This week's "Next Steps" give ways to love your neighbors through these ministries.

Remember in our story at the beginning, what the custodian said to Janae? "We are on the same team, you know... we work together for Jesus."

How true that is: we work together for Jesus—loving the person right in front of us.

NEXT STEPS

+Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.

1. Consider how you can show Jesus' love to the "neighbors" you encounter every day.
2. Find out more about our community ministries. Explore volunteer opportunities that might be a good fit for you.

New Braunfels Christian Ministries



FREE PRIMARY MEDICAL/DENTAL CARE FOR THE UNINSURED

Help your neighbors by volunteering

- As a medical/dental professional
- As an office assistant (no medical experience needed)
- As a greeter/prayer partner

nbvim.org | 830-632-5131



FREE AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING, MENTORING, NUTRITION PROGRAM

Help your neighbors by volunteering

- As a team leader, tutor, or reading buddy
- As part of our kitchen crew
- As a gardener in our KC garden
- As an office assistant
- As a bus driver

nbkidsclub.org | 830-626-7762



HEALTHY GROCERIES FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Help your neighbors by volunteering

- To pack grocery bags in preparation for pickup
- To greet our neighbors and carry groceries to their car
- To help with food orders and deliveries
- As a greeter/prayer partner

harvestfoodpantry.com | harvestpantry@gmail.com

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

- Ask God to help you rid yourself of any “us and them” thinking and see that we are all in need of God’s graceful provision and we are all in this together.
- Pray that God will remind you that it is “all about Jesus.” Ask God to help you know how much He loves you and to help you grow in His love so that your automatic response is compassion, drawing near to the person in need.
- Ask God if He would have you serve at Volunteers in Medicine, Kids’ Club, Harvest Food Pantry to love your neighbors in our community.

END NOTES

¹ Willard, Dallas. (2016) *Renewing the Christian Mind*. New York: HarperCollins. p. 132

