

Instructions:

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



Series: Neighbors

We are familiar with the basic teaching of Jesus to “love thy neighbor as thyself;” but who really is my neighbor? The person across the street, in the shared cubicle, on the same school bus... sure!! But what about the family that lives on the other side of town? The ones who just arrived as refugees? Or the one who stands on the corner with a sign? Do we really love these neighbors? And can we really love them without knowing them; their stories, their pain, and their needs?

Message description:

Jesus tells the disciples that they will receive power from the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses, starting in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. To be a witness to Christ means to tell the story of Christ and the story of how he has changed *your* life. To be a witness for Christ is to learn to love your neighbor as yourself. Or maybe another way to think about it is, to be a witness means to let the love of God be perfected or completed in you. The love of God is made known in the world through the acts of compassion, mercy, justice, and love among the followers of Jesus Christ. Perfect love casts out fear... and the love of God breaks down divisions and barriers in this world and empowers us to go in the love of God to places other people avoid. For we love because God first loved us.

Key Scriptures

Acts 1:8

1 John 4:7-21

Additional sources for independent study:

- Sermon by Martin Luther King Jr, Memphis, April 3, 1968: https://www.speeches-usa.com/Transcripts/martin_luther_king-mountaintop.html
- Grace Church for kids: <https://gracekidschurch.com/>

Questions Related to This Week's Message:

1. Who did you get to know this week in your neighborhood whom you previously didn't know?
2. After hearing the teaching, what do you think it means to be perfected in love now, or to have God's love be perfected in you? Do you agree that God's love must be completed, or carried out, through us?
3. What neighborhoods in Louisville were you taught to avoid? What reasons were/are given today (some good reasons, some maybe not)?
4. Have you ever been to one of these neighborhoods? What was your experience?
5. What is something we can do to get to know our neighbors here?

Going Deeper: You will know them by their fruit...

Read Matthew 7:15-20

In this passage in the sermon on the mount, Jesus instructs his early disciples on how to practice discernment. There will be many teachers who will come after Jesus; in fact, one of the main issues addressed in the letters to the early teachers seems to be false teachers who come within faith communities and teach a "gospel" counter to the message of Jesus Christ. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing. But Jesus tells them, you will know the believer by the fruit they bear.

- What "fruit" do you think Jesus is talking about here? [reference Galatians 5, fruit of the Spirit]
- They will know we are Christians by our love... you will know the intent of other believers, prophets, leaders, teachers, or folks with spiritual authority by the fruit they bear in their life. Are they patient, kind, compassionate? Are they growing to act more like Christ or less, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love?

Throughout the witness of scripture, we are given another image of what being "perfected in love" might look like. In 1 John 4 it is through **abiding with God**. In John 15 it is through **abiding with Christ, the true vine**; we are the branches and together we bear much fruit. And in Galatians, one who is growing in love of God and living a life in the Spirit should begin to **bear fruit of the Spirit**; that is evidence of God's love at work within them. Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

- Now read Matthew 7:1-13. Do you hear anything differently in our passage knowing that it follows teachings on judging others and the golden rule?
- What is the difference between judging others and discernment (watching out for wolves in sheep's clothing)? How can you practice such discernment without becoming judgmental?

Catching up [if you didn't do this last week, do it now and relay to Rachel!]

Spend some time thinking and praying about your hopes and dreams for the group this year.

1. What do you hope to get out of house group this year?
2. What is one thing you hope the house group does this year?
3. What is something you would like to study or learn more about this year? [send Rachel your answers!]
4. Where would you like to see your house group serve this year?

Close in prayer over your leaders, the group, the year ahead, and how God will challenge you to grow deeper in love with God and one another! And your neighbor!