

February: Love your Neighbours

Introduction

A smart fellow once came up to Jesus and asked "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus gave his pretty typical response of "What do you reckon?" and the man said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love your neighbour as yourself."

"Great answer!" said Jesus. But the guy wasn't finished. "Well who is my neighbour then?" And so Jesus whipped out a story.

One day a Jewish guy was walking down the road when he was attacked by bandits. They robbed him and left him beaten and bruised and half-naked by the side of the road. A priest was walking along the same road, but when he saw the guy he quickly walked by on the other side. A little while later a temple helper wandered up, but he too left the poor guy and hurried on. Then a Samaritan came up. Samaritans and Jews usually don't get along too well, but this Samaritan instantly felt sorry for the poor beaten up man, and he stopped to help. He cleaned up the man's wounds and bandaged them, then carefully lifted him onto his donkey and took him to the nearest motel. The kind Samaritan paid the motel owner to look after the man while he did some business. "I'll come back in a couple days," he said, "And I'll pay whatever else it costs."

Jesus' command to "Love your neighbour as yourself" is one of the strongest of his messages in the gospels, as well as one of the most well-known. But unfortunately it's a command that's not often lived out very well.

For Jesus, this is the very essence of what it means to be his follower. And we can see this key idea carried through in the writings of his followers later on. Paul repeats it loud and clear in 1 Corinthians 13 - the love chapter read out at many weddings. "Without love," he says, "I am just a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Sadly, many well-meaning Christians over the centuries have preached truth but sounded like a noisy gong - or a bleating goat - because they didn't show love at the same time.

So why is it so difficult? Two reasons come to mind. First, we don't have the right idea about what love is, and second we are too busy trying to work out who our neighbour is.

In our western world love has been reduced to a feeling towards someone else. In Jesus' culture love was action. It was giving your shirt to a person in need; it was giving a cup of water to someone who was thirsty; it was going the second mile even if you had already been forced to walk one. Love is about feeding a hungry person or sharing your resources with those in need. And most of all, it's about being there for people on a regular basis.

Love doesn't exist because I feel love for others; love is there when I act loving towards other people. The challenges this month are not about trying to change our attitude towards others - trying to feel differently towards the people we come across. If this is what we're trying to do than we're really focusing on ourselves still. Love is always unselfish, focused on others, and you can see this clearly in the way Jesus lived.

So that's what love is about. But what about the "who" question? Who is my neighbour? Whenever we hear the command to love our neighbour, it seems this is always the question that pops into our heads. But it's the wrong question. Jesus blows it apart with his little story, and the question at the end became "Which one of these - the priest, the temple helper, or the Samaritan - acted like a neighbour?" The answer is obviously the Samaritan. And Jesus says "Go and do the same."

In other words, the important question for us is How can I be a neighbourly person? It's all about living for others instead just for ourselves. This month, be a neighbour to the people around you, give to them, care for them, and love them as much as you love yourself. This month's challenges are about shifting the focus off ourselves and on to other people - whoever it is - whether it's family, friends, co-workers or classmates, or someone by the side of the road who desperately needs some bandages and a ride to the nearest motel.



LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

practice hospitality



FAMILIES



MONK

- ❖ Cut out two lots of paper hearts, some pink and some green and put them into your jar. Spend a week at work, school and home 'noticing'. When you notice someone doing something loving for someone else, write it on a green heart. When you notice yourself doing something loving for someone else, write it on a pink heart. At the end of the day pin or stick all these hearts to a wall near your jar. See how long your 'love-heart train' is by the end of the week.
- ❖ Set aside some time together and read the story of the Good Samaritan. When you've finished reading, ask each other these questions: Do you know any Samaritans? (unexpected people who have done something good or kind). Is there someone in your life who wouldn't expect you to do something kind for them? Do something kind for them this month.



CHEERLEADER

- ❖ Reproduce the story of the Good Samaritan in an artistic form (e.g. video your family acting it out, create a stop motion animation with play dough figures, create a collage). Share your story with the Big Year community.
- ❖ Invite your next door neighbours over for a meal. Make special invitations to give to them and place cards for the table. Make sure your whole family shares the work of meal preparation as much as possible.



ACTIVIST

- ❖ Together decide on a family or person you know who needs cheering up. Brainstorm as a family how you could help (be sure to listen to the youngest members of the family - they often have the best ideas). Choose one or two things to do and do them this month.
- ❖ Organise with your neighbours to celebrate International [Neighbours Day](http://www.neighbourday.org/) (<http://www.neighbourday.org/>) this year on 27th March. You might like to have a street party, a joint garage sale or a backyard BBQ.