**Gospel of God – SG Series: Week #6**

**The Gospel Where We Live – Our Family & Neighbors**

Written by Amanda Nash

**INTRODUCTION**

What do you picture when you hear the word “missionary”? A family of people living in North Africa? A single woman working in an orphanage in China? Or maybe someone traveling by boat up and down the Amazon river sharing the Good News of Jesus with remote tribes and people? The cool thing is, the men and women in the Early Church were missionaries to the people right next door…their neighbors. The Good News of Jesus spread like wild fire as Christian men and women served the poor around them, cared for and prayed for the sick and shared a meal with the people in their towns. Today we so quickly assume that mission work is for those who are the “greats” in the faith - people who are bold and willing to risk it all and move across the ocean to share the Good News of Jesus. But the truth is, we can change the world by being missionaries to those closest to us relationally and physically – our neighbors and families. Jesus talked about the 2 greatest commandments, love God and love your neighbor. If we just followed these simple commands to love God and love our *actual* neighbors, we could turn the world upside down!

**[Watch the short video] - *if showing the video during the small group meeting***

**[Text from video]**

I spent 3 years in Amsterdam as a part of a mission team sent from Vineyard Columbus to plant a church. During this time, I had such a strong outward focus towards people outside the church – because there was no church that existed yet! Our team used whatever they had to try to gather people. In my case, it was my new baby and my new apartment. I went to all my neighbors and introduced myself. We threw a party in my apartment and invited them all to come. Many of my neighbors had never even met each other before! (Which in our case was very strange since we all shared the same stairway entrance!) Our neighbors came along with several people from our church. My neighbors were very suspicious of us at first, but I watched them warm up as they watched us interact. They saw something attractive in us…something real. By the end of the party, one couple who lived upstairs had invited another couple from our community up to their apartment (something rarely done by Dutch people!) Just opening our door and serving some snacks was the opportunity for this couple to meet other Dutch followers of Jesus that they could relate to.

I also regularly visited one café on my street. I noticed a lot of strollers crammed in the back and several women chatting over coffee as their kids read and played. I just showed up with my little boy and I let him loose to interact with the other kids. I kept trying to figure out a way to start a conversation with one of the other moms, but couldn’t drum up the courage to try speaking Dutch. But quickly, one of the moms started talking to me (in English thank goodness!) I didn’t have to do anything but show up in my community and soon I was invited into the network of moms that lived in my neighborhood. One of the moms in particular because a very close friend and during my time there I was able to share with her the reason we moved to Amsterdam and the amazing impact knowing Jesus had on my life.

Jesus tells us in Matt 22 that the two greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbors. This was a reality when it was in my job description (and my livelihood depended on it!) but I found the second command more challenging as I entered back into a normal life in the United States. When I moved back with my family 2 years ago, I felt my outward focus wane. It seemed way harder to reach out to my community when I didn’t have the title of missionary or church planter. I struggle to talk to people I have lived next to for years (some of them I don’t remember their names!) Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon write in their book *The Art of Neighboring* that being a good neighbor matters. It can radically change a community.

Jesus must have known what he was talking about when he asked us to love our neighbors. He knew that would change the world…and it did change the world of the early Christians as they loved their neighbors, the good news of Jesus spread like wildfire! But this practice is something that gets lost for us today. We are busy people coming and going so much that when we are at home, we just want to veg out and relax. The most we pay attention to our neighbors is to be critical of how they park on the street of how long it takes them to take their garbage cans in. Some of you might be thinking it’s all well and good for missionaries and church planters to reach out to their neighbors, but I just don’t have time! I already have my friend circle. I want to finish by sharing one story from one of our own small groups who saw God use them in their neighborhood. I hope from hearing their story you’ll see how easy being a good neighbor can be and how God can use it to really show His love.

At our children’s bus stop last year, a man waiting with his kids overheard my friend and I speaking about bible study, before we started our new group. I hardly knew this family at all. Later, he approached me and asked for help with his twin girls before school. He explained that he was in the military and had to leave for trainings every so often. I offered to keep them in the mornings before school and give them breakfast and get them on the bus. When they came over to see our home and meet all of us, he asked if we were a part of a bible study. I told him about the one that would start in January 2013. Our group started and his wife came (after a few invites and persuasion). Then, he too came. Not long after their family found out he was going to be deployed for the 3rd time. It was devastating for them. I asked him to share with the group about his deployment before he left. I thought he would tell us some practical things, but he proceeded to pour out his heart and expressed such gratitude for the group and told us all how much he trusted us to be there for his family. He confessed his prior unbelief in Christian life and community and told us how he felt his eyes had been opened and he was beginning to understand it all. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever witnessed a man doing. He asked us all to step in and care for his family. Since then, our group has provided meals for them, helped with mowing her lawn and fixing things in her house, watching their girls before school each day, and caring for her heart while he is away. She and her daughters have started coming to the Vineyard and they love it! I believe God has so much more for this neighborhood. I can't wait to see what is in store!

Just talking at the bus stop about God opened up the opportunity for this leader to meet one of her neighbors and eventually see them meet Jesus! If we step out and take the risk, we may be surprised who is in need around us and how God will use us in simple ways to show his love to the world.

**Group question:** What holds you back from reaching out to those closest to you relationally and physically?

**ENCOUNTERING THE WORD**

**Read:** Romans 12:9-21 9Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012:9-21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28262a#fen-NIV-28262a)] Do not be conceited.

17Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,”[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012:9-21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28265b#fen-NIV-28265b)] says the Lord. 20On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
    if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012:9-21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28266c#fen-NIV-28266c)]

21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**Discuss:**

**In inductive bible study, we use three main types of questions, observation, interpretation and application. In observation, we are looking at the words on the page and pulling out the details from the text so that we can begin to understand the author’s original intent (Sometimes these questions seem simplistic, but this step is important understanding the meaning of the text.) Next, we move to interpretation. There aren’t any hard and fast answers to these questions. This is where we get to dig in with the Body of Christ and consider the observations we’ve made and ask the Holy Spirit to give us understanding. Finally, we have application questions, where we build a bridge between the world of the bible and our world today and try to press out what the text is telling us or asking of us personally. The questions are labeled below as to what type they are.**

1. (Observation) What expressions of love do you find in verses 9-16? Divide the expressions into positives (what to *do*) and negatives (what *not* to do). It might be good if you have a large group to split into groups of 2 or 3 and have them make a list together.
	1. Background note: There are several words in Greek that mean love. Up until this point, Paul has used the Greek word *agape* to describe love, but it has been only in the context of how God loves his people. Now Paul uses it to refer to how the Body of Christ should treat others.
2. (Application) Which of these expressions of love stand out to you? Why?
3. (Interpretation) Breaking down a few expressions in verses 9-16:
	1. In verse 9 the word “sincere” or “genuine” literally means “un-hypocritical.” How can we love people that we don’t actually *like* in a sincere way? (Paul’s commands to love are more about what people *do* instead of what they *feel*. We can decide to help people in practical ways and even pray for them even if we don’t particularly like them. Often, when we begin to act with love, our emotions change. If we always waited until our motives were completely pure, we would probably never act in love at all!)
	2. In verse 12, why do you think these three things are tied together? (Prayer often opens up hope and patience. As we are faithful in prayer, we see changes in our own attitudes and outlooks on life.)
4. (Interpretation) Why do you think Paul instructs Christians to love the way that God loves? (Paul believes that loving the people around them will be an expression of the good news of Jesus. Paul has spent the entire letter laying out the Gospel and the implications of God’s radical love. Then he uses the word “therefore” in 12:1 to connect this radical love of God with the radical love that should exist in Christian community. Christian love is an example of God’s love and the unity expressed among Christians can be a credible witness to those outside of the body of believers to who God is.)
5. (Application) Which of these expressions of love are the most difficult for you?
6. (Observation) What is the theme of verses 17-21? (revenge and forgiveness)
7. (Interpretation) What does it mean that Paul instructs them to “leave room for God’s wrath” (v. 19)? (The Christian faith is not one devoid of justice. We don’t simply “forget” wrongs that are done. God has brought justice in his Son which Paul has been describing throughout his letter to the Romans. We forgive, but the reason we forgive is because “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom5:8). Our expression of forgiveness is one that reflects this incredible act God did in Jesus.)
8. (Application) How do these instructions to forgive and even to “overcome evil with good” provide a challenge for you?

**RESPONDING TO JESUS**

**Personal response(s):**

1. How can you begin expressing agape love in with those closest to you…your family and your actual neighbors? Start by making a neighborhood map and attempt to just learn the names of the people in the 6-8 houses closest to you. Read The Art of Neighboring by Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon for more ideas like this.
2. Consider praying and asking God to bring to mind 1-2 people who have been a struggle to forgive. Meditate on Roman 5:6-11 and ask God to give you the ability to extend this kind of radical forgiveness. What would that look like practically? What would be your challenges? How would you respond if the other person did not receive your offer of forgiveness? Have someone pray for your encounter.
3. Consider re-issuing a challenge for everyone to watch Pastor Stephen Vandop’s very short video this week explaining the nuts-and-bolts of sharing the Gospel.

**Video link: vimeo.com/74740494**

**Group response(s):**

1. How can we as a group express God’s agape love with each other? With those around us?
2. Consider going through David Benner’s book Surrender to Love together to get in touch with God’s love so that you can pour it out to others.

**Group prayer:**

Lord, we are so grateful that you loved us even though we didn’t deserve it. We pray that your radical love would overwhelm us so much so that we leak it all over everyone we come in contact with. We pray that you would use us to change our families, friends and neighborhoods. We pray you would make us a living example of the way you forgive and love each and every person you created. And we pray that our example would soften people’s hearts to you – that they might know you for themselves and taste your radical love. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.