



Seeking Time for My Neighbors

A Time to Reflect

Relationships are important to Jesus. He created relationships and made the sacrifice to reconcile them when they were broken. He spanned time and space to benefit others. He came into a world that was filled with neglected and broken people. His heart went out to them when he saw their needs. *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd* (Matthew 9:36).

- *Identify the crowds of today that would bring a similar response from Jesus.*
- *Share some of the stories of the pain and brokenness in the world around you.*

A Time to Review

God was clear in the Old Testament on how he wanted his people to be separate from the rest of the world. In the New Testament he reminds us that we are aliens and strangers on earth. That puts a unique burden on a Christian who lives as a child of God in this world.

Ephesians 5:1,11-12,15-17 *¹Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children . . . ¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret . . . ¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*

- *Discuss why Christians often tend to avoid interaction with many other people in their world.*

2 Corinthians 5:14-16 ¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

- Explain how Christ's death on the cross changes our perspective toward others.

At times we become so self-focused on preserving our own purity that we forget why Jesus also hung around with sinners. It didn't change who Jesus was because he knew his identity. But through his presence with them God changed others. Christ comes to others through you, and you serve him through others. The Apostle Paul urges us, *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Ephesians 5:1,2). God gives evidence of the heart he has for all people in what he says about touching the lives of others through ours.

Deuteronomy 10:12,17-18 ¹²And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, . . . ¹⁷For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. ¹⁸He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

- Summarize what this reveals about God's heart and how that translates into our lives with our "neighbors."

And then there is the picture Jesus paints of Judgment Day when he exhibits the hearts of those who are his children—his sheep sitting on his right hand who will inherit eternal life.

Matthew 25:34-36,40 ³⁴"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me . . . ' ⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

- Paraphrase what Jesus reveals as important for the use of time for those who believe and follow him.

Love lets the neighbor's need set the context for love. The need provides the opportunity for communicating Christ's love in words and actions. Let Christ's love draw you to the cross and remember how far Jesus was willing to go for us when we didn't know or want him—and definitely didn't deserve it. Return to the cross to realize the joy found in his forgiveness for times we fail to make time for others.

A Time to Repent

Jesus looked at the people around him and had compassion on them. He healed them, fed them, dined with them, taught them, defended them, forgave them, and wept for them when they turned away from his love. At times we can look at our own lives and imagine how he weeps at our poor witness of his uncompromising and unconditional love. Jesus often illustrated how far we are from the perfection the law demands:

Luke 10:25-35 ²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷He answered: " '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.'" ²⁸"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." ²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Read the rest of the story in Luke 10:30-37 to discuss how "being a neighbor" is related to our use of time.

- Who does Jesus define as our "neighbor?"
- Which elements of the story of the Good Samaritan convict you?

Luke 6:27-28,31-33,37-38 ²⁷"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you . . . ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that . . . ³⁷"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

- How much time would we normally give to those with whom we differ? How does Jesus say we should treat these people?
- Spend time in quiet prayer right now confessing any lack of love for the "neighbors" God has placed in your life or the lack of time you've devoted to extending Christ's love to them. Then ask for forgiveness and a new spirit from the one who washes away our sins. (Psalm 51 may be a good prayer starter for you).

A Time to Renew

No matter where we turn, our stewardship is about relationships—with God, family, the body of Christ, and neighbors. It is important to be aware that everything you say and do is a witness for or against Christ's love. That includes the way you handle problems, frustrations, delays, and disappointments. It includes your reactions to those around you. Do you show yourself as gentle or judgmental? When feeling the pressure of time and stresses are you rude and bitter or polite and patient? Christ's love drives us to make the most of every opportunity to use our time wisely to communicate his love which drove him to die for us.

1 Peter 2:11-12 ¹¹*Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

Colossians 4:3-6 ³*And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Philippians 2:14-15 ¹⁴*Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*

- Discuss what these passages say about your time interacting with “neighbors.”

- Identify what God desires as the final outcome for our time with “neighbors.”

Jesus tells us, his followers, that our lives are to be salt and light to this world. In order for “neighbors” to benefit we have to be visible so the light can shine for them—that they may see our lives and praise our Father in heaven for what they receive from him.

A Time to Recommit

⁹*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:9-10).*

Make every effort to readjust your time to respond as Christ to your neighbors.

- Begin each day by praying, "Jesus help me to see and love people the way you do." Then read the gospels to review God's pure grace and learn how Jesus interacted with people.
 - Create a list of those "neighbors" who you realize need you to reflect Christ's love and light.
 - What can you do in the coming weeks to make this real in your life?
 - Discuss how you as a church can become more accessible and make time to respond to the needs of your congregational "neighbors."
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- *If available, fill out a chart for yourself similar to pages 12-13 in the Love Takes Time booklet. Then consider your commitment and action plan (p. 16) in preparation for next week's class.*

Prayer