

BETTER NEIGHBOR INITIATIVE

Imagine a world filled with good neighbors....

People who go out of their way to help someone else.
Communities where kindness is expected because it is the norm.
Neighborhoods and apartment complexes where people know the people around them.
Sharing.
Helping.
Enjoying life together.

This image seems like a mythical utopia in our world where so many people feel disconnected from the community where they live. Much, if not all, of our connection happens digitally or at work. What of our home lives? What of our communities?

We are endeavoring to call out the church to set the tone. If we want communities filled with quality neighbors, then we must set the standard by being exemplary neighbors. And shouldn't that be the expectation anyway?! Christ has clearly called us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Yet many Christians have been lured into Christian bubbles where they have little contact with the outside world. Others have followed the secular pattern of retreating into social media silos. We all can be better neighbors. And we must! If for no other reason, it is through being better neighbors that we discover and create avenues for sharing the eternity-changing message of the Gospel with the world around us.

The purpose of this study is to help small groups of people (LifeGroups or D-Groups) think through how we can prepare our hearts and minds for the work of being better neighbors. The discussion guide relies upon the Scriptures and supplemental material from *Before You Share Your Faith* by Matt Smethurst and *Overcoming Walls to Witnessing* by Timothy Beougher. The guide provided here is simply that – a guide. Feel free to let your conversations roam in spiritually nourishing directions! I have personally learned that discussions that stray off course can help me build deeper and richer relationships with others. The purpose is not to check off the “I did the curriculum” column; the purpose is to deepen our walk with the Lord as we learn together. The discussion guides intentionally include more material than can be covered in a singular meeting (especially meetings where you have “talkers”). Feel free to cover only parts of the curriculum or to stretch out the curriculum longer than we have laid it out. The curriculum is only a tool.

May we embark on a journey that leads to internal change within our hearts and spiritual fruit as we invest in our neighbors. May we truly become better neighbors as we:

KNOW – engage your neighbor
SHOW – tangibly love your neighbor
SOW – invest spiritually in your neighbor

God bless you!
Bro. Rob

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SESSION ONE

The Gospel

Prior to the Session:

- Read Chapter 1, “Grasp the Gospel” in *Before You Share Your Faith*
- Read Chapter 3, “Breaking the Barrier of Ignorance” in *Overcoming the Walls to Witnessing*
- Read Romans 10:8-15.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.
- Read John 9.

Discussion:

- Smethurst writes sections about (1) The Ruler, (2) The Revolt, (3) The Rescue, and (4) The Response. In this breakdown of the Gospel, he is highlighting the holiness of God, man’s sinfulness, Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice, and a call to repentance. What are the consequences of removing even one of these concepts? Discuss what it would mean to remove each (i.e. Sharing the Gospel without discussing “the revolt” or sharing the Gospel without beginning with the “The Ruler”).
- Share any insights you gained from *Before You Share Your Faith*. Share systematically through the four sections listed above.
- Smethurst writes, “There is more mercy in Jesus than there is sin in you.” Do you think Christians fully appreciate this truth? How can we think more deeply about this axiom?
- How do you see the reflection of Smethurst’s four categories in the passage from Romans that we read? Are there any other categories Romans includes?
- How do we see the reflection of Smethurst’s four categories in the passage from 2 Corinthians?
- Do you ever feel like you don’t know enough to share the Gospel with others? What effect does this have on you?
- In *Overcoming Walls to Witnessing*, Beougher lists 7 bullet point on pages 40-41 that can help us share what Christ has done in our lives. Which of these tips speaks to you the most about sharing your testimony?
- Discuss how the blind man who was healed in John 9 used his testimony to share his faith with others.
- What are the dangers of thinking The Gospel is only for the lost? Why do we need to regularly preach the Gospel to ourselves?
- On pages 41-45, Dr. Beougher talks about how God uses ordinary people to share the Gospel. What did you think of what he said here?

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SESSION TWO Contextualization

Prior to the session:

- Read Chapter 2, “Check Your Context” in *Before You Share Your Faith*
- Read Acts 17:22-34.

Discussion:

- Begin by discussing any insights you had from Chapter 2 of *Before You Share Your Faith*.
- On page 25, Smethhurst writes, “Clearly, those days are over. In a secular post-Christian age, we cannot presume any basic assumptions in those we are trying to reach with the Gospel. So we must take care to lean in and listen well, to climb into the other person’s way of seeing and inhabiting the world.” When it comes to evangelism, do you think most people focus more on listening or on being heard? What are the ramifications of this?
- I love the clarification that Smethhurst makes on page 27 when he writes, “When it comes to the Gospel, we don’t need to dress it up in order to make it cool. We need to break it down in order to make it clear.” So many churches have become “seeker sensitive” or driven by the culture in the name of contextualization. Other churches have ignored the context in which they minister. In your opinion, how can Christians (and churches) “thread the needle” between these two extremes?
- What are some truths that some Christians are compromising in the name of “contextualization”? How can we address those same issues without compromising the truth?
- On page 35, Smethhurst quotes John Piper on creating new categories in the thinking of our audience. Someone read this quote aloud. Discuss 1) which categories we may need to create, 2) how we can do that, and 3) challenges to creating these new categories.
- Discuss the Acts 17 passage. How do we see Paul contextualizing?
- How does Paul create new categories for his audience?
- How does Paul resist the urge to compromise the Gospel?
- Let’s personally talk about our contexts. Particularly, let’s focus on the KNOW part of the Better Neighbor Initiative strategy. Take a second a share about your neighbors with the group. Be specific. Share names, places of work, interest, children, pets, anything....
- What are the greatest challenges you have in getting to know your neighbor?
- Close with a time of prayer for your neighbors.

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SESSION THREE Love for Neighbor

Prior to the Session:

- Read Chapter 3, “Love the Lost” in *Before You Share Your Faith*
- Read Chapter 4, “Breaking the Barrier of Apathy” in *Overcoming the Walls to Witnessing*

Discussion:

- Begin by discussing any insights from the two chapters we read in preparation for today.
- Beougher enumerates four ways we can improve our compassion for the lost, beginning on p. 52.
- First, he calls us to believe what the Bible teaches about hell. Do you believe what the Bible teaches about hell? Do you think the modern church believes it? Why do many ignore this doctrine?
- Second, Beougher challenges us to remember that time is short. Do you think you do this well? Have someone read James 4:14 and Hebrews 9:27.
- Third, Beougher says that consistently spending time in Scripture will cultivate a love for the lost. Do you think this is true? Share how it has/has not been true in your own life. Discuss how you are doing with this in the current season of your life.
- Fourth, Beougher calls us to spend time with the lost. Share with the group how you do this on a regular basis. Plan how you can do this better both this week (think small steps) and this month (think slightly larger steps). Hold each other accountable for actually doing this.
- Fifth, we build compassion for the lost by spending time in intercessory prayer. Read Romans 10:1. What drove Paul to pray for the salvation of others? Commit to use part of your time together praying for lost neighbors and family members. Keep confidence so that you can pray specifically for others.
- Beginning on page 44, Smethurst discusses the two ditches that we can fall into when it comes to relationships and evangelism. Discuss these two ditches, making sure everyone understands the concept. Which ditch do you tend to veer towards most frequently?
- How do we actually love the lost without making them feel like “a project”?
- Are you a good listener? If you improved, how do you think it would better communicate love to others?
- Smethurst ends with a quote from Penn Jillette. Have some use a smart phone and search “Penn Jillette on evangelism.” Play the clip for the group.
- End by praying for the people on your list of lost loved ones and neighbors.

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SESSION FOUR Conquering Fear

Prior to the Session:

- Read Chapter 1, “Breaking the Barrier of Fear” in *Overcoming the Walls to Witnessing*
- Read Chapter 2, “Breaking the Barrier of Giftedness” in *Overcoming the Walls to Witnessing*
- Read Chapter 4, “Face Your Fear” in *Before You Share Your Faith*
- Using a concordance or the internet, make a list of all the “Fear Not” commands that you can find in the Bible.

Discussion:

- Begin by sharing any general insights from Beougher’s chapter on overcoming fear.
- Read aloud the paragraph beginning at the bottom of page 16 in *Overcoming the Walls to Witnessing*. Beougher talks about how fear can be a positive thing. Have you ever thought about it like this before? Discuss as a group.
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:7 and 1 Corinthians 2:3. What do these verses teach us about our fear and our insufficiency when it comes to serving Christ?
- Beougher lists three resources that help us combat fear. They are (1) power, (2) love, and (3) discipline. Which of these do you struggle with the most?
- When sharing Jesus with others, are you tempted to wait for the perfect moment?
- Have someone read beginning with the first paragraph at the top of page 57 in *Before You Share Your Faith*. Continue reading through the paragraph at the top of page 58. As a group, reflect on Smethhurst’s thoughts.
- How does a firm confidence in God’s sovereignty help us overcome fear in sharing Jesus with others?
- Smethhurst writes, “And here’s the liberating lesson for us: we are not in the blindfold-lifting business! We cannot unblind a single mind or heart. Our job is to simply hold out Christ; God’s job is to lift the blindfold” (64). Have you always thought about evangelism in these terms? Has anyone in your group ever thought of evangelism as resting upon you – meaning that you were personally responsible for the salvation of others. What difference does it make in us when we trust God’s sovereignty in evangelism versus feeling like the responsibility to save others rests upon our shoulders?
- Take a moment and be honest with each other about how fear effects your evangelistic interactions with others. Be honest and be specific.
- Close by sincerely praying over each other that you would share Jesus with confidence and overcome fear.

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SESSION FIVE Gifted or Not

Prior to the Session:

- Read Chapter 2, “Breaking the Barrier of Giftedness” in *Overcoming the Walls to Witnessing*
- Read “There’s No Such Thing As The Gift of Evangelism” by Ed Stetzer, published here: <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/174968-theres-no-such-thing-as-the-gift-of-evangelism.html> (or just google “Ed Stetzer Gift of Evangelism”)

Discuss:

- Who is the greatest evangelist that you have ever personally known? (By “evangelist”, I don’t necessarily mean someone who travelled from church to church preaching revivals. Think in terms of people who lead other people to Jesus.)
- Today’s discussion revolves around the subject of giftedness. It is important for us to establish that God has given spiritual gifts to his church. He has imbued every believer with a spiritual gift(s).
- Read the three primary lists of spiritual gifts in the bible – Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.
- What gifts do you see mentioned in more than one of these passages?
- Do you see the gift of evangelism listed here? Is there another term that could be understood as evangelism?
- Read Ephesians 4:11-16.
- This passage lists “offices” as gifts. There is the office of apostle, prophet, pastor, and evangelist. These offices are gifts to help strengthen the church. In other words, the Bible tells us that God has given the church the gift of *evangelists*, but not the gift of *evangelism*.
- Beougher cites Larry Gilbert on page 26-27. Read that citation.
- The bottom line issue is this: who is expected to do the work of evangelism? Only those with the gift of evangelism? Consider this. There is a gift of mercy listed in the passages we read. Are only those who are gifted with the gift of mercy expected to show mercy to others. The same logic can be applied to other gifts like the gift of generosity or hospitality. Ultimately, *all believers* are commanded to declare the Gospel to the world.
- Does anyone here think they are a gifted evangelist?
- Does anyone here think they are excused from the call to evangelize and make disciples?
- As a group, discuss setting goals for yourselves to have a spiritual conversation with someone – a conversation that pushes you outside of your comfort zone. That conversation may look different for different individuals because we are all coming from different places. The main point is to challenge each other to greater Gospel faithfulness.
- Take time to pray for one another and pray over your list of lost loved ones and neighbors.

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SESSION SIX Got No Time for That

Prior to the Session:

- Read Chapter 6, “Breaking the Barrier of Busyness” in *Overcoming the Walls to Witnessing*
- Read Luke 10:38-42.

Discuss:

- Discuss any general insights you had from chapter six in Dr. Beougher’s book.
- Have you ever thought about how busy Jesus must have been? Discuss.
- Read Mark 6:31. What does this passage tell us about the busy ministry of Jesus?
- What would you say are the top three time-wasters in your life?
- If you were to put your last three days under a microscope, what parts could legitimately be labeled as “Has Eternal Significance”?
- Dr. Beougher writes about having God’s perspective on time and eternity. Take a moment and discuss his thoughts on pages 72-75.
- Do you feel like you have a biblical frame of reference on time and eternity? What can you do to improve that?
- We read Luke 10:38-42 in preparation for today. Do you identify more with Mary or Martha? Why?
- What are ways that you already use your time that you can “repurpose” to be used for Kingdom things? i.e. Talking to another parent while you wait for your kid at dance class rather than scrolling social media
- Who invested time in you so that you could hear the Gospel? Have you ever thought about the time sacrifices that they had to make?
- In the Better Neighbor Initiative, we are talking about KNOW, SHOW, and SOW. None of these can be done without the investment of time. Let’s focus, however, on how showing tangible love to our neighbors requires an investment of time. What are ways we can plan to invest in our neighbors to show them that we love them and that God loves them? How can we include our families in this endeavor?
- Read Colossians 4:5. Read Ephesians 5:15-16. How can we apply these passages to our lives this week?
- Close by praying for faithfulness in your use of time and by praying for your list of loved ones and neighbors who need Christ.
- If your small group only gathered together for the purpose of the Better Neighbor Initiative, discuss continuing to meet for the purpose of accountability and encouragement. What would you like to study next? Continue to pray for each other.