Luke 10:25-37 *The Neighboring Life: Stay: Love Where You Live*

***Stay, Pray, Play, and Say***Brian Mavis is a pastor from Colorado and one of the authors of the study we are currently using: *The Neighboring Life.* He tells a story about his desire to be a better dad. He says that he decided he needed a plan, and because he is a preacher, he decided to come up with words that rhyme in order to help him follow through.

The words he came up with were stay, pray, and say. He committed to **Stay** in his daughters’ lives. By that, he meant not only that he would be physically present, but that he would be emotionally and mentally present as well. He decided that he would commit to being a student of his kids, cluing in to the things that they were passionate about, paying attention to the things that were worrying them or that they were looking forward to.

He also committed to **Pray.** By paying attention to what made his girls tick, he was going to have more information to talk with God about when he said his regular prayers.

And then he committed to **Say**. He wanted to make sure he told them every day that he loved them. He looked for opportunities to speak into their lives about family values and what it meant to know and love God.

Then, one day while he and his youngest daughter were goofing around, she said to him: “Daddy, my favorite thing about you is when you’re silly!” At that moment, he said he realized there was a fourth word he could rhyme with the others: **Play.** An important part of knowing and loving his daughters was making time to just have fun with them.

That commitment to be a better dad led Mavis and the rest of his church staff to apply these four words to more relationships, and particularly the relationships that we have with our neighbors. If we want to be better neighbors, we need to practice Stay, Pray, Play, and Say.

And so, for the next four weeks, we are going to look at each of these practices with regard to the people who live right next door.

***The Exact Places Where They Should Live***So today, we are going to focus on the first one: staying. What this means is being present in our neighborhoods. Being people who are intentional about learning the names of our neighbors and building relationships with them. This is about seeing our homes as more than just a place we commute to and from so that we can get to the important things like work or school or church; but seeing our homes as a place where we build relationships and live life together with our neighbors.

Last week Krista Petty, one of the other contributors to the Neighboring Life study, was here and she mentioned **Acts 17:26**. I want to put it up on the screen again:

26From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

In context, the Apostle Paul is talking about how God is sovereign over all the nations. This is part of Paul’s speech in the middle of Athens, Greece. So Paul is telling the Greeks that God has a say in their country just as much as He does in Israel.

But the phrasing is so interesting, because what Paul is saying about every nation he can also say about each of us: God has determined the times and places for where we should live. That is to say, it is no accident that you live where you live right now. God knew the address you would be living at today, and He knows precisely how long you will be there. And for as long as you stay where you are: whether that be a house or an apartment or a farmstead or room at a care center or a dorm room or a camper out by the lake, you are called to bless your neighbors.

Stay present in your neighborhood. Stay involved in your neighborhood. Stay interested in your neighborhood.

The title for today’s sermon is sort of a play on words. I called it “**love where you live.”** On the one hand, that could be the slogan for a real estate office, right? I want you to love where you live. I want you to have a home that you love to be in. I want you to have all the space and the amenities and the views that you want and need. I want you to be happy with your home.

But I also mean it in another way: I want to challenge you to love, where you live. That is to say, I want to challenge you to love the people that God has put right next to you. I want to challenge you to practice the second greatest commandment—“to love your neighbor as yourself”—with the people who live next door, or across the hall, or in the apartment directly above you, or the acreage across the section. I want to challenge you to love right where you live.

***The Good Samaritan***Our text today is a very familiar story. It’s probably one of the two most well-known of Jesus’ parables. It’s the one we call the story of the Good Samaritan. It’s found in **Luke 10:25-36**. Let me read it:

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?"

30In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."   
      Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

***What Kind of Person Am I?***

This story is pretty easy to understand. The Samaritan is a good guy. The priest and the Levite are jerks. Simple enough story. But Jesus wants more from us than for us to applaud this one man’s kindness. Jesus isn’t just telling a story. He wants to change us.

Part of the key to understanding what Jesus wants from us here is to pay attention to the context. We need to pay attention to why Jesus tells this story.

In **verses 25-29** Luke tells us that Jesus was being tested. This happened all the time to Jesus. “Experts” and “theologians” would come to Jesus and ask questions, not because they were curious to hear His answers, but because they were hoping to expose some flaw in His thinking. It’s like the kung-fu movie I mentioned a couple of weeks ago. The opponents keep lining up to take Jesus on. He uses theological jujitsu to put them in their place.

So now an “expert in the law” asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. But Jesus turns the question back around, “How do you read it?” And the answer is: “Love the Lord your God with all you heart; and love your neighbor as yourself.”

This “expert” gives basically the same answer that Jesus gives in Matthew, the passage we looked at a couple weeks ago. It’s possible that he has heard Jesus give this answer, and he clearly agrees with Jesus. This is the great summary of the law. Love God. Love your neighbor. We call this the Great Commandment.

So far, Jesus and his questioner are on the same page.

But this theologian has another question. Luke tells us that he wants to justify himself. Though he knows the answer to how to inherit eternal life, he might not be fully living it out. So, just to cover his bases, he asks: “And who is my neighbor?”

In other words: “Who qualifies for my love?” This guy wants to know just who he is required to be ncie to.

You see: the Jewish people of Jesus’ day tended to see people in categories. I’ve heard it described as concentric circles. There was the Jew himself in the center; surrounded by his immediate relatives; then his kinsman (those of his tribe); then everybody who was of Jewish descent like he was; then everybody who had converted to Judaism; and then, finally, on the last circle, everybody else.

This theologian wants to know: how far out on the circles is he supposed to go? At what point do people stop being neighbors and start qualifying as strangers? More and more Israel was becoming a crossroads of nations. There were Roman soldiers and Hellenist traders and Samaritans and Syro-phoenicians. Just how far is his love supposed to go?

And this is what prompts Jesus to tell His story of a Samaritan who stops alongside the road to help a man beaten by robbers. But notice: Jesus isn’t really answering the question: “What kind of person is my neighbor?” Rather He changes it to: “What kind of person am I?”

No longer is it a question of: “What status of people are worthy of my love?” Instead, Jesus wants us to ask: “How can I become the kind of person whose compassion disregards status?”

Do you see that? When Jesus gets to end of the story, **he asks a question**: “Which one of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” When the expert answers correctly, Jesus’ instructions are simple: “Go and do likewise.”

Instead of asking: who qualifies to be my neighbor? We should be asking: what kind of neighbor am I?

The parable of the Good Samaritan isn’t about somebody else, it’s about the expert in the law. It’s about us. Jesus wants us to put ourselves in the story. He’s calling us to take action.

Forget about who qualifies for your love. Forget about who fits in your circle. Ask yourself: Am I the kind of person who shows love? This parable forces us to ask: What kind of neighbor am I?

So, let’s ask that question. Let’s look at what the Good Samaritan did, and **ask ourselves** if we are the same kind of neighbor. There are three things that stand out to me about the Good Samaritan.

***See the Need***

First, ask yourself: am I the kind of neighbor who will **see the need?** The Samaritan begins by noticing.

One of the remarkable things about the story Jesus tells is that three people see the need of the man lying along the roadside, but only one really saw it. The priest “saw the man” but crossed to the other side of the road. The Levite “came to the place and saw him” but also passed by on the other side. Only the Samaritan, in verse 33, “saw him” and took pity on him.

All three of these guys were busy. They were on a journey. They had things to do. People to see. They were carrying on the duties and business of life. But there was a difference in the three. Two people saw and went *on*. One person saw and went *to*. (Lance Ford and Brad Brisco, Next Door as it is in Heaven, p. 27)

Only the Samaritan took time to notice what was going on. He was aware of this man’s need, and he was willing to interrupt his schedule to do something about.

At the beginning of his book *Good to Great in the Social Sector* author Jim Collins tells this story:

During my first year on the Stanford faculty in 1988, I sought out professor John Gardner for guidance on how I might become a better teacher. Gardner, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, founder of Common Cause, and author of the classic text *Self Renewal*, stung me with a comment that changed my life.

“It occurs to me, Jim, that you spend too much time trying to be interesting,” he said. “Why don’t you invest more time being interested.” (quoted in *The Neighboring Church*, pg. 92)

Another man named Collins, Frederick L. Collins, made the same point with this quip: “There are two types of people—those who walk into a room and say, ‘Here I am!’ and those who walk into a room and say, ‘There you are.’”

If we are going to be good at the practice of staying, we need to work more on being interested than interesting. We need to see our neighbors. Get to know them. The authors of our study write:

Staying is about loving your neighbors by learning about your neighbors. It’s not just about physically staying around; it’s about staying attuned and staying interested. (Ibid. p. 92)

A great tool for this can be those block maps we handed out last week. If you didn’t get one, or you want a fresh one, we have them available by the picket fence in the lobby.

These block maps are not just a quiz to find out how many of your neighbors’ names you know, but they can also be a place to jot down some notes about your neighbors. What are their histories? Their hopes? Their hurts? You might want to stick a block map on your fridge or in your Bible, and use it as a place to record the things you are learning about your neighbors.

Good neighboring begins with the simple act of seeing. Taking an interest in those around you. Getting to know them.

***Have Compassion***

Second, ask yourself if you are **the kind of neighbor who has compassion**. The Samaritan stands out because his heart was open to this man.

Verse 33 says that when the Samaritan saw the man, “he took pity on him.” Most other translations says “he had compassion.” The theologian recognizes this as the Samaritan’s central characteristic when, in verse 37, he calls him “the one who had mercy.”

Pity, compassion, mercy. Call it what you want, this Samaritan saw the need and he identified with the man’s pain. That’s what compassion is. It’s the ability to put yourself in somebody else’s place and feel their situation. It’s a willingness to take somebody else’s hurts on yourself.

And the interesting thing about this, of course, is that the Samaritan was the least likely candidate to stop and help. Today, because of this story, we automatically think of a Samaritan as somebody who helps. That’s what the word means to us now. But not in Jesus’ day. Not at all.

You see, the Jews and Samaritans were enemies. And, truth be told, the Jewish people did not treat the Samaritans very well. To the Jews, Samaritans were half-breeds who had a corrupted view of God. The Jews tended to treat Samaritans as second-class citizens.

And so, from the Samaritan’s perspective, a Jew lying on the side of the road was not a likely candidate for pity. The expected thing would have been for a Samaritan to laugh in delight at the Jew’s plight, or spit on him and give him a couple of kicks for good measure. This is sort of like a Palestinian terrorist finding an Israeli soldier lying wounded by the side of the road today. You don’t expect it to end well. The twist in Jesus’ story—the punchline--is that the hero of the story shows mercy to someone who had absolutely no claim on it.

And that’s important for us to keep in mind in this whole business of neighboring, because we have a tendency to put people into categories. We create our own concentric circles. And if we put somebody into a category that doesn’t line up with the categories we put ourselves in, well then we tend to distance ourselves from them.

So, maybe your neighbor is a Democrat while you identify as a Republican, or vice versa. Or maybe your neighbor has different standards for what it means to keep the yard neat than you do. Or maybe your neighbor dresses differently than you do, or listens to a different kind of music, or keeps a different schedule, or…any of a thousand things that could say: “Oh, you’re different than me. We’re not the same. We won’t get along.”

Having compassion means caring about someone else in spite of our differences. Having compassion means overcoming those differences with a heart of caring. The authors of our study say that good neighboring means:

I will listen and accept you for who you are. I will continue to love you as Jesus would love you. And you are welcome in my space and life. I will really listen to you and not [just] listen for all the places where we are different. (Ibid. p. 97)

And, before I move on to the third point, let me mention something else here. When Jesus tells this story, He uses extremes. He pictures a man with the direst of needs, beaten and left for dead on the side of the road; and He chooses one of this man’s severest of enemies, a half-breed Samaritan, to play the hero. But I don’t think that Jesus means to say that every opportunity to love your neighbor needs to look so extreme. Jesus is illustrating love in the unlikeliest of circumstances to remind us to love in the more ordinary circumstances.

Which is to say, we must not think that loving our neighbor is all about us—as the good little Christians who have our lives all together—coming along to love our neighbors who are poor and desperate and need someone like us to make their lives better. Loving our neighbors well isn’t just about us serving those who are in need, it’s about living our lives together with those around us.

In fact, maybe one of the most loving things you can do for a neighbor is allow him or her to serve you. One of the best ways to stay present in your neighborhood is to turn to a neighbor when you need to borrow a pick-up, or have someone check on your pets, or to grab your mail while you are on vacation. Ask a favor of your neighbor, and they’ll be much more likely to ask you to do a favor for them in return.

***Do Something***

And then, third question: Ask yourself: **Am I the kind of neighbor who will do something?** The Samaritan revealed himself as the good neighbor because he took action.

That, of course, is what really sets the Samaritan apart. Not only did he feel pity for the beaten man, he went out of his way to see that he was helped.

In fact, more than just going out of his way, the Samaritan went to great expense as well. Oil and wine were like a first century first aid kit. The oil soothed, the wine acted like an antiseptic. And they were valuable. But he’s pouring them out on this stranger. When he gets to the inn, he gives the innkeeper 2 silver coins—2 days worth of wages—and promises to pay more if needed.

In other words, this man’s mercy had legs. He had pity, and he did something about it.

And I believe Jesus is calling us to show the same sort of compassion in action.

At the end of the story, the very last line of the text, Jesus says: “Go and do likewise.” He’s not trying to give us another neat story to tell; He’s seeking to change the way we live.

If all we do is talk about being good neighbors, and the importance of knowing our neighbors’ names, and how nice our neighborhoods could be if we were all better neighbors—but we don’t actually do anything concrete, nothing will change. We can give ourselves credit for thinking nice thoughts, having compassion in our hearts, and maybe even saying a prayer or two; but Jesus’ definition of loving your neighbor calls for something more than that.

The authors of our study quote an Old Testament scholar named Lois Tverberg:

This full-bodied definition of the word love also teaches us that loving others must include action, not just mental feelings. We cannot fully obey God’s command to love our neighbors by just thinking nice things about them. To love them encompasses getting up off our chair and showing them God’s love by helping them in any way we can.

Then they write:

It’s not enough to talk about neighboring; people have to be challenged and expected to act. (Ibid. p. 74)

So here’s what we are going to do. We are calling it the Neighboring Challenge. And for each of the next four weeks you are going to find these colored cards on your pew. There’ll be a different color for Stay, Pray, Play and Say. And the cards will have different challenges that you can do to help you be a better neighbor.

This week, there are something like 17 different challenges, and they are distributed randomly. Some are fairly simple, like this one that says: “Look at your neighbors with a positive spirit” and some are a little more involved, like this one that says “Bake something and bring to a neighbor you do not know well.” And some are in between, like this one that says “Take a regular neighborhood walk. Make sure you stop and visit with any neighbors who are outside.”

Like I said, they are distributed randomly. I don’t want this to be a guilt trip. I don’t want anybody to feel like they got stuck with an activity they really don’t want to do. I would even suggest that if you want trade with someone, you can.

But, at the same time, I think of that passage from Acts that says that God appoints our times and places and I think maybe you got the card you got today for a reason, and maybe God wants you to stretch yourself a little bit.

And, if you really want to stretch yourself, if you complete one card, or think the card you got is too easy, we will tape more cards to the picket fence in the lobby and you can grab as many as you want.

The idea is that you would take the Neighboring Challenge this week and see if you can do the thing the card instructs you to do. Se if you can take one small step to being more present in your neighborhood. See if you can follow the Good Samaritan’s example of loving your neighbor as yourself.

As Jesus says: “Go and do likewise.”