

THE HEIGHTS

CHURCH

LIFE GROUP TEACHING PLANS
THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD
LESSON 1

THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

FROM APATHY TO ATTENTIVENESS

LESSON 1

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Acts 17:26-27 and Luke 10:25-37. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

- > **Series Theme Aim:** Loving our neighbors means choosing to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, and initiate rather than sit idly.
- > **Biblical Emphasis:** God has put us here on purpose, so we need to make the most of the opportunities that we have been given.
- > **Teaching Aim:** Loving our neighbors means moving from apathy to attentiveness.
- > **Memorize:** Luke 25:37b

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 Name some of the most notable TV neighbors of all time (i.e. Wilson from “Home Improvement,” Kramer and Newman from “Seinfeld,” Penny from “The Big Bang Theory,” Joey and Chandler from “Friends,” Barney from “How I Met Your Mother”). What qualities made these TV neighbors stand out?

- 2 Think about your own life. Are there qualities that stand out to you about your neighbors? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

- 3 Regarding your neighbors, which of the following do you currently relate to the most: a person’s home is his or her castle; good fences make good neighbors; mi casa es su casa (my house is your house); good friends make the best neighbors; or, may I borrow a cup of sugar? Explain.

Today we’re beginning a 12-week series that will cause you to think about the place you live as a God-given opportunity to live out His command to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Instead of viewing our homes as places to escape in isolation from the world around us, God calls us to shift our thinking. To do that, we must first understand that God has put us where we live on purpose. If we never apply the call to love our neighbors to our actual neighbors, then we will fail to live out that purpose.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

Ask a volunteer to read Acts 17:26-27.

- What does it mean that God has “determined allotted periods and the boundaries of (your) dwelling place”?
- Have you ever considered that God has also placed your neighbors around you for a reason? What are the implications of that truth?
- From verse 27, why does God care where you live and how you relate to your actual neighbors?

Paul emphasized that God created all people—every nation on the earth. The appointed times can refer to seasons or to historical periods. The boundaries of where they live can refer to habitable areas or to national boundaries. In either case, Paul emphasized God’s sovereignty and His goodness in meeting people’s needs.

The purpose of God’s providential care is that people might seek Him. Without God’s full revelation, people grope in darkness with little hope of finding light. The Stoics taught that through reason a person could know the divine. In contrast, Paul maintained people do not discover God, but our knowledge of Him comes as He makes Himself known to us.

- How do these verses move us from an attitude of apathy toward one of attentiveness toward our actual neighbors?

When we understand that God has purposefully put us where we live, it changes the way we see and relate to our neighbors. One practical way we can move from apathy to attentiveness and make the most of the opportunity we've been given is to live by "The Always Rule." The Always Rule means that if you see a neighbor that you don't know well, pause whatever you're doing and greet them. Always. If you're walking to the car and are in a hurry, if you're getting groceries out of the car, or if you're picking up a package—always. Let's read what Jesus said to a man who didn't think The Always Rule applied to him.

Notes:

> Ask a volunteer to read Luke 10:25-28.

- Why do we sometimes ask God to show us His will about a matter when we already know the answer? What are some examples of ways we might do this with our neighbors?
- What is the relationship between loving God and loving others?
- How would our neighbors know if we loved them as we love ourselves?
- How do you understand Jesus' statement in verse 28, "Do this and you will live"?

Jesus required His followers to put the law of love into action. Demonstration of love comes as a grateful response to God's love, not as an attempt to win it. We are to love God with all our being, and we are to love our neighbors. Our actions reflect our hearts: loving God and loving others are natural responses of those whose hearts belong to God.

> Ask a volunteer to read Luke 10:29-35.

- Why did the expert in the law want to “justify himself”?

Notes:

At this point in the encounter, the expert felt a loss of control. He had embarrassed himself by asking a question to which he knew the obvious answer. In an attempt to justify himself, the expert asked a follow-up question that also was often debated among the scribes: “Who is my neighbor?” The very question implied the lawyer’s belief that the definition of “neighbor” excluded some people. Typically, the Jews saw people such as Gentiles, Samaritans, and tax collectors as outsiders. By categorizing people in this way, they put limits on love.

- What are some reasons we give to justify apathy toward our neighbors?
- Based on Jesus’ parable, how would you describe apathy toward your neighbors? How would you describe attentiveness?
- It’s not likely that you’ll see a neighbor lying injured on the sidewalk when you drive home from work. So practically, what would it look like for you to “go and do likewise” this week?

Jesus pointedly commanded, “You go, and do likewise.” Love for God and love for neighbor go hand in hand. Jesus redefined neighborliness in a way that removed limitations imposed by personal preconceptions. Every house on your block represents an opportunity for you to be a good neighbor—those people should be treated with the same kindness and mercy in which God treats you.

NEXT STEPS

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

Did you know it is almost impossible to walk in a straight line while blindfolded? [Option: Mark a spot across the room and blindfold a volunteer. Then direct him or her to walk in a straight line to that spot.] To get to an intended target without veering off course, you need vision. This series is about seeing the big picture and taking intentional steps to be the kind of neighbor Jesus calls us to be. We will never move from apathy to attentiveness if we do not determine to take the steps necessary to do so.

- 1 When have you missed the mark of crossing the street to be a neighbor because you lacked proper vision or intention?

DO NOT SKIP THESE

- 2 Provide a blank block map for each group member (found on pg. 9). Instruct them to imagine the middle square represents where they live and the other boxes are the eight houses situated nearest to them. Beside "A" in each square, challenge members to write the first and last names of the neighbors who live in the houses represented by the position of each box. Beside each name write "S" for stranger, "A" for acquaintance, or "F" for friend. Why is learning the names of your neighbors step one in seeing the big picture and acting with intentionality where you live?
- 3 Will you agree to take step one toward the heights of neighboring this week by working to fill in the names you don't know? What are some ways you can choose to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, and initiate rather than sit idly in order to take that step? We will begin looking at your neighbor map next week.

Challenge group members to put the block map in a place where they will see it each day as a reminder to take the step of learning names this week.

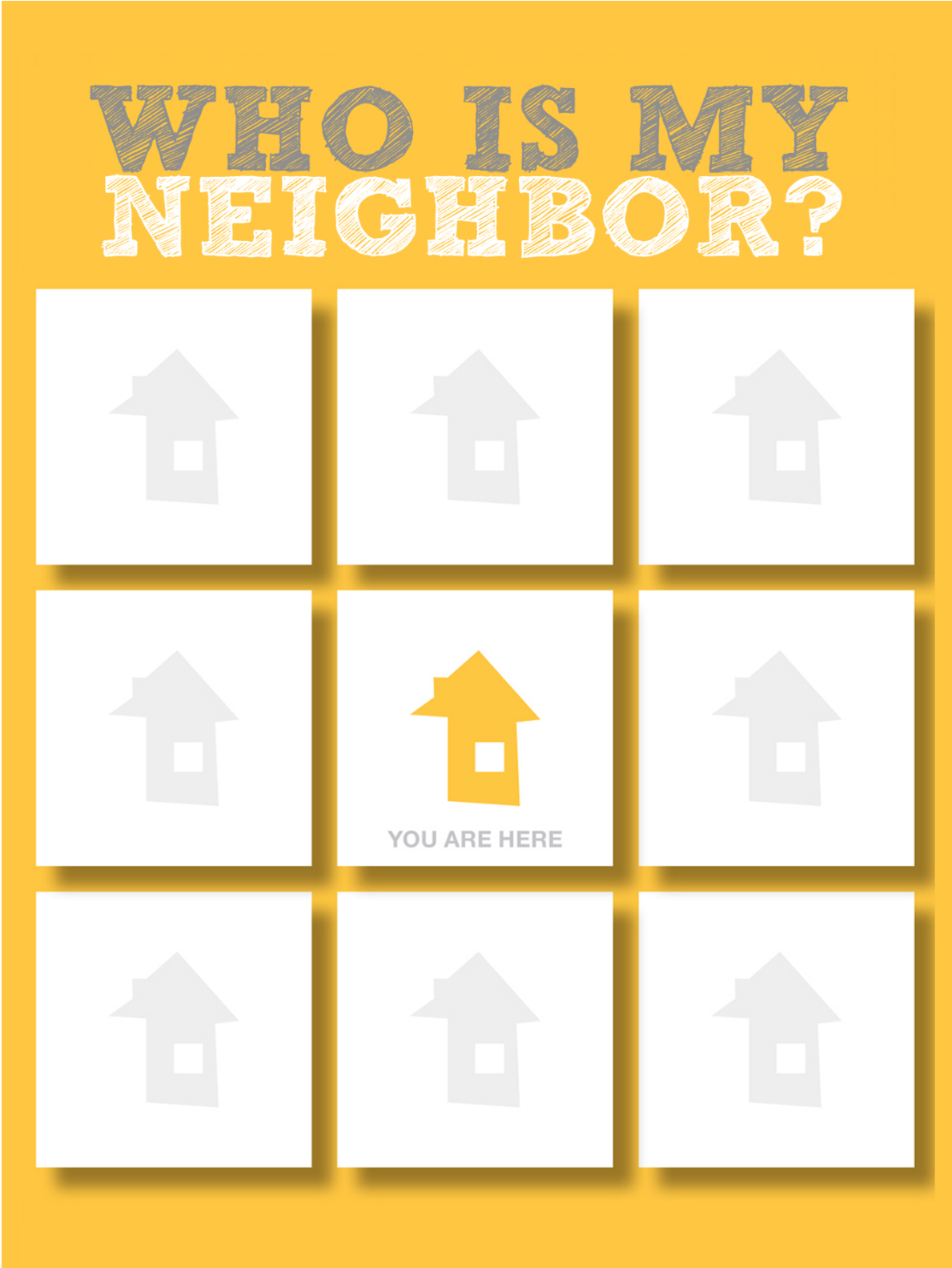
P R A Y

Thank God for His great intentional love in your life. Pray that God would lead you to see the places where you live as opportunities divinely appointed by Him. Ask Him to lead you to make the most of those opportunities, starting with learning the names of your neighbors this week.

Notes:

F O R N E X T W E E K

- > **REMIND:** Before you dismiss, remind group members to read Luke 10:38-42.
- > **EMAIL:** Midway through the week, send a reminder email with the following information:
 - Read Luke 10:38-42.
 - Think through these questions before we get together again:
1) Have you learned any names of neighbors you couldn't name on Sunday? 2) Have you placed your block map in a place where you see it often? Has that helped serve as a reminder to you to take step one? Why or why not?



ACTS 17:26-27

Paul's first teaching focused on God's distance from us; the second emphasized His nearness. From one man, Adam, God made all nations. The wording could mean national boundaries or the habitable areas of the earth. The Greek philosophers could resonate with Paul's words. Indeed Paul quoted two of the Stoic poets in 17:28: Epimenides (around 600 B.C.) and Aratus (who lived around 315-240 B.C.). The Stoics took the poet's words we are his offspring to mean that all humans are divine. Paul understood that we are God's children, not in the sense of sharing divinity but in the sense of being His creation.

Notes:

LUKE 10:25-37

10:25. As Jesus emphasized this truth about God's inner working in believers' lives, an expert in the law interrupted. This Jewish legal scholar, sometimes referred to as a "lawyer" or "scribe," knew the law and interpreted it for the understanding of others. He rose to test Jesus' teaching. Possibly the expert insisted that Jesus justify this new teaching. Did it conflict with the law in any way? The Jewish religious establishment felt a need to protect traditional interpretations. Any new teaching raised suspicion. So the lawyer put Jesus on the spot, posing a question commonly debated by the scribes and rabbis: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In this context, "eternal life" designated the salvation that comes from entry into God's kingdom.

10:26. Jesus responded to the expert in a manner typical of the rabbis, answering the expert's question with another question. Jesus asked, "What is written in the law?" to clarify the expert's understanding, adding, "How do you read it?" In other words, Jesus asked the lawyer to express his understanding of how the Old Testament answered the question of gaining eternal life. As a student of the law, the expert already knew the answer to his own question. Jesus pressed the man's comfort level, however, when He turned the question back to the expert.

10:27. The lawyer answered with Scripture, saying to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, strength, and mind—a statement drawn from Deuteronomy 6:5 that expressed the central truth of the Jewish faith. Jews repeated the larger passage, known as the Shema (see Deut. 6:4-9), twice daily as an affirmation of God's place in their lives. The terms "heart," "soul," "strength," and "mind" represented the whole person.

Notes:

Scripture also demands that you love "your neighbor as yourself." Here the expert restated Leviticus 19:18. Loving someone as much as you love yourself does not represent a selfish attitude. Rather, it means that you value the lives of others based on how much you value the life God gave you. A "neighbor" in Jewish understanding usually meant someone of your own kind. Jews considered other Jews to be neighbors. They rarely extended neighborliness outside their own circle.

10:28. Jesus commended the expert as correct, but did not affirm the man's view of salvation by "doing." Acts of love toward other people may be commendable, but they do not save us. Jesus charged the scribe to "do this" and "live." In other words, practice what you know. The real test of a heart right with God and the law is not knowledge of it but acting on it. Jesus required His followers to put the law of love into action.

10:29. The man asked a follow-up question that also was often debated among the scribes: "Who is my neighbor?" The very question implied the lawyer's belief that the definition of "neighbor" excluded some people. Typically the Jews saw people such as Gentiles, Samaritans, and tax collectors as outsiders. By categorizing people in this way, they put limits on love.

10:30. Instead of answering this question directly, Jesus told a parable. He told of a man, a traveler, on the road down from Jerusalem to Jericho. From Jerusalem's elevation at 2,500 feet above sea level, travel to Jericho—which lay below sea level—was depicted literally as down. This made the steep mountainous journey through the Judean wilderness treacherous.

Take note that Jesus did not identify the traveler as being a Jew, Gentile, or Samaritan. He was a human being—period. The man fell into the hands of robbers. Although the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was well-traveled, the mountainous terrain and lonely stretches made the journey ripe for ambushes by unscrupulous people.

Notes:

10:31. As the injured man lay in the road, other travelers came upon the scene. The first, a priest, came down the road. The priest likely was traveling from Jerusalem toward Jericho as well. This priest passed by the traveler without offering aid. Why did he refuse to help? Perhaps he thought the man was dead. Touching a corpse resulted in spiritual defilement. Maybe the priest feared the robbers might return and attack him too. Or maybe he simply felt no compassion in his heart for a stranger. The motive for ignoring the man, however, remains unimportant for Jesus' point.

10:32. Jesus told of another passerby, a Levite. Levites also served on a rotation in the temple. They handled various temple details like security, cleaning, and preparation of equipment for sacrifices. Although not as high ranking as priests, Levites still held a sacred trust. The Levite also saw the injured man. Like the priest, he also avoided the scene and passed by on the other side.

10:33. In contrast to those who steered clear of the victim, the Samaritan helped him. No doubt the identification of the helper startled the listeners. History records a dark relationship between Jews and Samaritans. Animosity between them made this story a stunner. Surprisingly for the hearers, Jesus said the Samaritan had compassion for the traveler. The word “compassion” denoted more than feeling pity for someone. It meant to experience the pain with them to the point of doing something to help. The Samaritan exemplified the “doing” of love for a neighbor.

10:34. The Samaritan first provided treatment for the man's wounds. Healing and cleansing agents, olive oil and wine, were used. The helper showed no concern for his own defilement or safety. After performing first aid, the

Samaritan put him on his own animal. This act depicted true humility. Then they traveled to an inn where the man's injuries could be treated in a safer, more comfortable environment.

Notes:

10:35. As if he had not done enough, the Samaritan gave two denarii as an advance to the innkeeper. This amount covered lodging and care for the victim for a number of days. The Samaritan instructed the innkeeper to take care of the wounded man, promising to reimburse the innkeeper if more than the two denarii were required. Over-and-above actions by the Samaritan illustrate Jesus' concept of neighborliness. He went far beyond what anyone might expect.

10:36. Again Jesus posed a question to the scribe: "Which of these three proved to be a neighbor?" Jesus called for a decision from His hearers. He challenged the expert's boundaries around neighborly activity, pushing him beyond the comfortable place of theory and debate to a struggle with his personal prejudices.

10:37. The legal expert grudgingly answered Jesus' question. Notice that he refused even to say the word Samaritan. Instead he said, "The one who showed mercy." Nevertheless, the answer hit the target. A merciful God bestows love on unworthy sinners. In response to that love, those who receive mercy gratefully allow it to overflow into the lives of others. Jesus pointedly commanded, "Go and do the same." Love for God and love for neighbor go hand in hand. Jesus redefined neighborliness to remove limitations imposed by personal preconceptions.