

THE HEIGHTS

CHURCH

LIFE GROUP TEACHING PLANS
THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD
LESSON 4

THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

FROM NEBULOUS TO NOW

LESSON 4

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Hebrews 10:24; Genesis 1:26–2:2,18; and Esther 4:14. 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:** Everything in our lives is given by God to make us more Christlike. Our relationships are for our growth.
- > **Teaching Aim:** Loving our neighbors means moving from nebulous intentions to clear initiatives.
- > **Memorize:** Esther 4:14

INTRODUCTION

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

DO NOT SKIP THESE

- 1 What comforts did you overcome this week in order to invest in your neighbors? How did praying for God to enable you to overcome those barriers impact the way you thought about those comforts?

- 2 Look again at your block map. (Provide a blank copy for guests and new members, found on pg. 10) Place a star beside 2-3 neighbors you would like to better develop relationships with. **OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:** Provide new blank maps for everyone. Before choosing 2-3 neighbors to star, challenge members to fill in as much information as they can without looking at their original maps as a way of seeing what information they have learned since the start of this study.

Notes:

So far in our study, we've been thinking largely in general terms about relationship to our neighbors. We've identified some of our neighbors, and we've identified some of the hangups that keep us from getting to know them. This week, we're going to narrow our focus and see the challenge before us in moving from nebulous thoughts about being a good neighbor to actually taking the steps that are required for it to happen.

- 3 Are you an extrovert or an introvert? What are some relationship challenges that come with that leaning?

Understanding that everything in our lives is given by God to make us more Christlike radically changes our view of relationships. No longer are our neighbors simply our neighbors—they are people God has placed in our lives for an important purpose. Without taking initiative in relationships, believers would be joyless and ineffective, and the church’s mission would stall. We were created for relationship, and through our relationships we experience growth.

Notes:

UNDERSTANDING

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

> Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 1:26–2:2,18.

- What does it mean that you were created in God’s image? How should this fact impact your view of yourself? How should it impact your view of your neighbors?
- What are some ways the idea of being made in God’s image is distorted today?
- Oftentimes, God’s people isolate themselves and exist apart from meaningful relationships. What did God say about that? Is it simply “not good,” or do you think God meant it was dangerous and harmful? Explain.

God created us for community. He has wired each of us for relationships, just as He Himself is a relational being (this is what the Trinity demonstrates). The creation of the man left creation incomplete. The man was alone, which was not good. He needed someone to whom he could relate and with whom he could fulfill God’s will, so God created the woman as

a helper for the man. *Helper* refers to someone who supplies what another lacks. While the woman would be like him, she also would be different.

Notes:

The same is true of your neighbors! As a believer in Christ, you might be thinking about how God wants you to invest in your neighbors, but the truth is, God wants you to let your neighbors invest in you, too. They will likely be different than you, but by God's design, that's a good thing.

- When have you experienced the goodness of relationship with someone different than you? Was it easy or difficult for that relationship to form? Explain.

> Ask a volunteer to read Hebrews 10:24.

- Have you ever thought of your actual neighbors as people who God might want you to spur on toward love and good deeds? Why or why not?
- Hebrews 10:24 is an instruction for the church—relationships between believers. Does that mean it doesn't apply to your neighbors who may or may not be Christians? Explain.
- Have you ever been encouraged by a neighbor who did not attend your church? How so?
- Think about the people on your block map who you starred in the introductory activity. What would it take for you to get to the place where you might spur each other on toward love and good deeds?

Our concern for one another helps to promote love and good works. A huge reason for being a good neighbor is to help other people spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Hebrews 10:24 is written about relationships in the body of Christ. At the same time, we are to have an outward focus, seeking to invite others into the body. That doesn't happen by inviting people to church nearly as effectively as it happens by demonstrating God's love for people and investing in relationships outside the walls of the church. That requires that we—introverts and extroverts alike—involve ourselves with others.

Notes:

> Ask a volunteer to read Esther 4:14.

In Esther 4, we find the Jewish nation in a literal “do or die” situation as the Jewish people faced the threat of death. Esther taking a huge risk was the Jewish nation's one last hope. In Esther 4:14, Esther's uncle, Mordecai, challenged her to consider how she could steward her influence for God's glory. We have been put where we are by God to do the will of God for such a time as this.

- What do you think Esther was feeling during this conversation with her uncle? How might you have felt? Why is it important to seek God's glory, no matter how we feel?
- What do we learn about Mordecai's trust in God from his charge to Esther? What does the story of Esther teach us about God's hand on our lives?
- Describe a time when you knew for certain that God put you in a certain place or situation in order to influence others on His behalf. Why do you think God chose you for that task? How did you handle the responsibility?

Talk about moving out of your comfort zone! Mordecai implored Esther to talk to the king about saving their people. Revealing that she was a Jew could have jeopardized her position. It could have cost her everything. She could have chosen to play it safe, be cautious, and keep her mouth shut, looking out only for herself. Instead, she chose to put herself at risk for the chance to save her entire nation.

Notes:

Esther was put in a position of power in a particular place and time for God's purposes, "for such a time as this." It was not by mere chance that God had given her favor with the king. Have you considered that God may have put you where you are right now for such a time as this? You may be the only believer in your neighborhood. You may be the only Christian in your family. Will you stand up for God's glory? Will you use your influence where you are, when you can?

- Esther's choice was between nebulous concern for her people or acting on behalf of her people in real time. What selfless act is God calling you to pursue in your neighborhood? What will you do?

NEXT STEPS

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

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- Which of the following points from today's lesson are most encouraging and challenging to you as you consider moving from nebulous thoughts about loving your neighbors to initiating relationships with those neighbors? 1. All people are created in God's image and made for relationship. 2. We are meant to spur one another on toward love and good works. 3. God placed you in your neighborhood for such a time as this. Explain.

- 2 How might knowing that God is in control and is directing your life strengthen you as you move from the nebulous to now in loving your neighbors?

Notes:

DO NOT SKIP THIS

- 3 Determine a specific next step you will take with one of the neighbors chosen in the introductory activity. Verbalize the step you plan to take with the group for accountability.

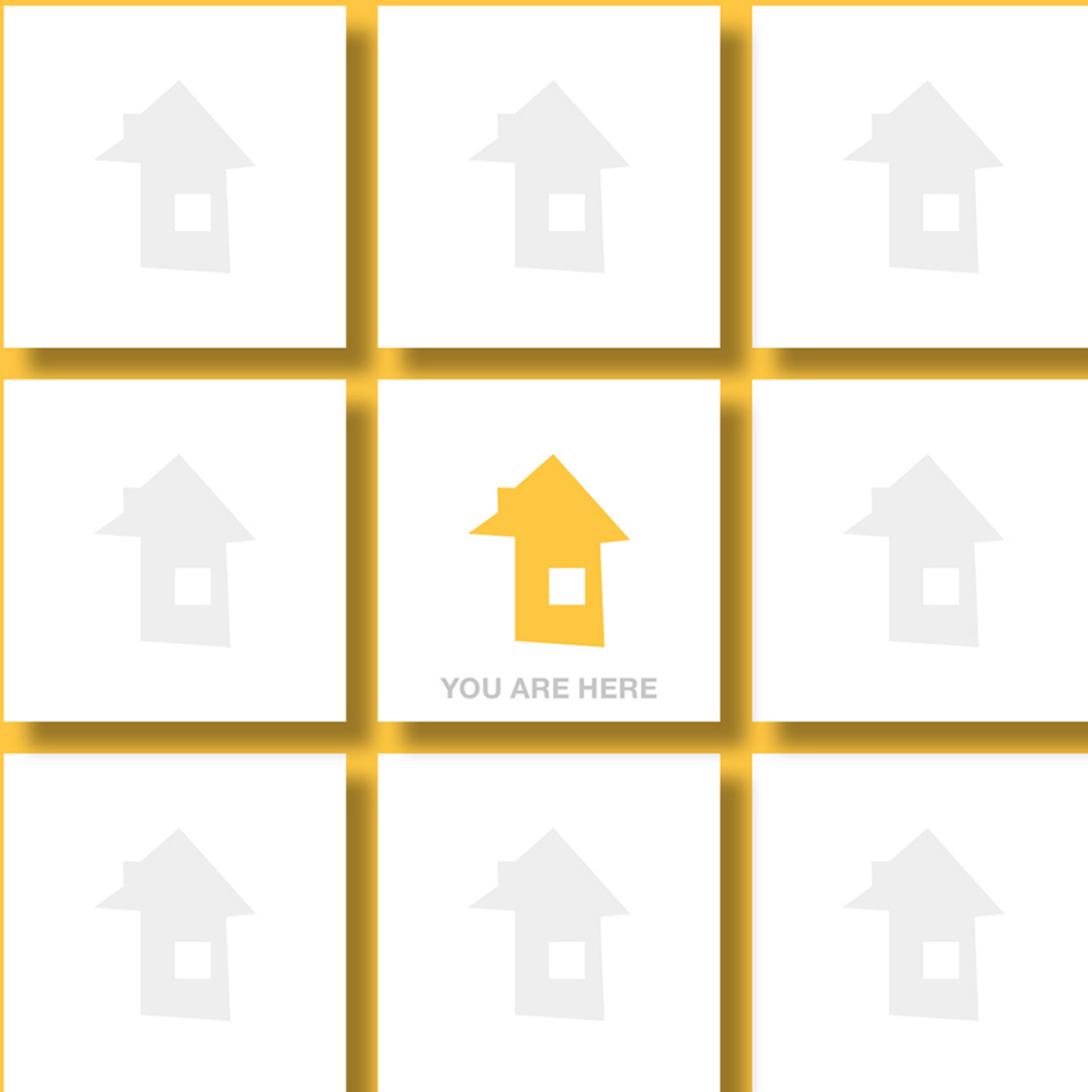
PRAY

Thank God that everything He gives you, including your neighbors, is meant to make you (and others) more Christlike. Ask Him to continue changing your view of relationships, causing you to see your neighbors as people made in His image, put in your life for such a time as this to grow toward love and good works.

FOR NEXT WEEK

- > **REMINDE**: Before you dismiss, remind group members to read Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15; and Acts 8:26-40.
- > **EMAIL**: Midway through the week, send a reminder email with the following information:
 - Read Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15; and Acts 8:26-40.
 - Think through these questions before we get together again: 1) Which neighbors have you identified as people with whom you can begin building relationships? 2) What step have you taken this week to build a relationship with that person or people?

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



GENESIS 1:26–2:2, 18

1:26. God's use of plural pronouns (*Us... Our... Our*) to refer to Himself has raised many questions (3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8). At least five different suggestions have been put forward to explain them: they may be references to (1) the Trinity, (2) God and His angels, (3) God and creation, (4) God's majesty as expressed by a literary device known as the "plural of majesty," or (5) a polytheistic view of God. Since the Bible teaches elsewhere that there is only one God (Dt 6:4; Mk 12:29; 1Co 8:4), the fifth option is not tenable.

Notes:

1:27. The creation of humanity is the crowning event of chapter 1, as shown by the fact that *created* is repeated three times. The verb "created" (Hb *bara'*) is the same one used in 1:1, referring to a kind of creative activity that only God can do. The term "man" (Hb *'adam*) is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to refer to humanity in general, not just males (7:21); all people, both male and female, are created in the image of God (cp. Jms 3:9). People are the only beings that are created in the image of God (Gen 9:3-6). The Bible never lumps people into the category of animals. Instead, it separates the creation of people from all other beings and attributes the most privileged roles in creation to humans alone.

1:28. In this the longest of the five blessings found in the account of creation, God gave humanity five different commands. Implicit in the first three commands is God's blessing on the institutions of marriage and the family. The final two commands, to subdue the earth and rule the animal kingdom, express God's blessing on the use of the planet's renewable and nonrenewable natural resources. Of course, only the wise use of these resources permits people to fulfill God's command to fill the earth. A similar command to the survivors of the flood is shorter, having only the first three verbs in it (9:1).

2:1-3. As Genesis 1:1 previews what that chapter contains, 2:1 summarizes the preceding events. More than a literary technique, though, the verse repeats the dominant message: God is in charge. He is sovereign, meaning He has

the authority and power to do what He chooses. No physical portion of creation and no social institution is outside His control. God had made all that is.

Notes:

This is the first use of the number seven in the Bible, a number that will play an especially significant role in the religious and social life of ancient Israel (4:15; 7:2-4,10; 21:28-31; 29:18-20). On the seventh day God rested, thus setting an example for people—who are made in His image—to follow (Ex 20:8-11; Dt 5:12-14). Though God rested from all His work that He had done, this is not to say that God has abandoned the universe. In the NT Jesus affirmed that God is still at work in the world, even on the Sabbath (Jn 5:16-17). This is the only instance during the creation process when God blessed a unit of time. The term holy is applied in the Bible to something set aside for service to God.

2:18. The theme of God providing for Adam's needs is picked up again here, as God declared that Adam's being alone is not good. God created the man with a need to relate to one as his complement, and now God will meet that need. Adam's understanding of the nature of the animals he named only highlighted the differences that existed between him and the rest of God's creatures: no helper was found as his complement.

At what must have been a moment of loneliness in Adam's life, God stepped in to create one who would perfectly meet Adam's need. Because God took one of his ribs to use as His raw material, the woman would correspond perfectly—though not identically—to Adam. Like Adam, the woman possessed God's image. Adam's first recorded words express his delight with God's handiwork and his recognition of the unique suitability of God's last recorded creation in the creation accounts.

HEBREWS 10:24

Our concern for one another has, according to the author of Hebrews, a specific focus. We should promote love and good works. He would not be satisfied with a feel-good type of concern. Our concern for one another should produce more loving attitudes in the church and good deeds. The author devoted chapter 11 to some heroes and heroines of faith; they could serve as role models for Christian behavior. Later in the book the author pointed to our imitating mature Christian leaders (13:7). Above all, the book highlights Jesus as our inspiration for living the Christian life. The author also encouraged his readers to meet together. Some of his original readers might have been worried about persecution if they identified too much with the church.

Notes:

ESTHER 4:14

Esther had no safe choices. Appearing unbidden before the king could mean death, but remaining silent, when so many servants and eunuchs knew of her connection to Mordecai the Jew, could likewise result in her death once the genocide was carried out.

Mordecai's statement that help would come from another place if Esther remained quiet is intriguing. The most obvious interpretation is to understand the phrase "another place" as a veiled reference to God. Others find it more likely that "another place" refers to a human source of deliverance, possibly Mordecai himself or another well-placed Jewish official similar to Nehemiah, who served Ahasuerus's son (Artaxerxes) as cupbearer. Mordecai and Esther would regard liberation and deliverance, whatever the source, as attributable ultimately to God's providential care for His people. This conclusion is supported by Mordecai's famous suggestion that Esther had come to your royal position "for such a time as this."