



Who Exactly Are My Neighbors, and Why Do I Have to Help Them?



Session Objective

Participants will come to understand that calling each other “neighbor” means making a commitment to helping people regardless of how the people are perceived by others.

Faith Statement

The new life takes shape in a community in which people know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are. They therefore accept themselves and love others, knowing that no one has any ground on which to stand, except God’s grace.

—Confession of 1967 (9.22), inclusive language version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What does the word *justice* mean?
- What are some behaviors or issues that you associate with justice or injustice? For whom are we called to act justly?
- What is the difference between doing what is right and getting what you deserve?
- What are some behaviors or issues that you associate with justice? What are some behaviors or issues that you associate with injustice?



Explore

Read Luke 10:25–37 and explore these questions:

- Why were the people building a tower? Why did they? If the lawyer had pressed Jesus to define who his neighbor is, rather than describe how to be a neighbor, what might Jesus have said? What kinds of limits might Jesus have placed on neighborliness?
- If there are limits of neighborliness to people toward whom we are supposed to act justly, from where do those limits come? If we are really supposed to act justly to everyone, how do we do that for people who live in other places?
- How does this Scripture passage address the question for this session: Who exactly are my neighbors and why do I have to help them?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they’ve learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- How do your everyday actions and habits affect people? When might you be complacent or complicit in people’s suffering?
- How can you make decisions or change habits in order to help victims of these sorts of injustices?
- What sorts of circumstances in the world make it more likely that some people will suffer injustices?
- Even if you can’t help individual victims, how can you work to reduce those sorts of unjust circumstances so that we don’t need as many Good Samaritans?



Exit

Have participants name an issue of justice that they care deeply about and pledge to focus on this week. Close your time together with prayer.





Why Do I Have to Help People Who Aren't Willing to Work to Help Themselves?



Session Objective

Participants will discuss what Jesus means by “the least” of them. They will also explore how we are called to work against poverty in any form in light of this passage.

Faith Statement

The reconciliation of humankind through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God’s good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world’s poor is the cause of his disciples. The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls all people to use their abilities, their possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to them by God for the maintenance of their families and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise hopes for better conditions and provide people with opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.

—Confession of 1967 (9.46), inclusive language version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer, and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Do you think people who need help are in need more because of their own fault or because of unfortunate circumstances? Why?
- If there are people in need who are trying, even just a little bit, to help themselves, what is it about the way the world works that makes it hard for them to succeed?
- How might you be responsible for contributing to the conditions that make it difficult for vulnerable people to succeed?
- Which should the church do for people in need: give things, help them help themselves, or change the ways in which society keeps people in need? Explain.



Explore

Read Matthew 25:34-45, and explore these questions:

- For each of Jesus’ six categories, what are some specific, real-world examples of people in need?
- If Jesus told this story today, what are some other categories of justice he might mention? For those categories, what are some real-world examples of people in need, whom Jesus calls “the least of these”?
- To which of the categories do you think Christians pay the most or least attention? Which does your congregation care about the most or least?
- What do you think happens in our world when we focus on specific issues more than individual people in need? What could happen if we really cared for people while standing up for justice?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they’ve learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- How can we change the way the world works to remove the conditions that lead to homelessness and other injustices?
- Do you think people who are homeless would prefer that we give coins or make social change? Explain.
- Why did Jesus never withhold help to someone for being too lazy, full of mistakes, or sinful?



Exit

To end the session, have participants imagine what it would be like to be homeless. Close your time together by thanking God for today’s conversation and praying for people in need.





Session Objective

The story of Stephen shows us that when we are filled with the Spirit, we cannot help but speak out, even when doing so puts us in danger. Participants will explore what it means to speak God's truth in love.

Faith Statement

The church's commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and sacrament. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes and plans.

—Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.26–8.27



Engage

Open your time together in prayer, and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What does it mean to stand up for something?
- What is the difference between standing up for and standing up against something?
- What causes of justice do you stand up for? What injustices do you personally stand up against? How do you do that?
- What sorts of injustices need more people to stand up against them? What causes need more people standing up for them?
- What sorts of dangers, discomforts, or sacrifices might you face for standing up for or against those sorts of things?



Explore

Read Acts 6:8–15; 7:1–2a; 7:51–8:1, and explore these questions:

- What did Stephen stand up for? What did he stand up against?
- What dangers did he face?
- How would you describe his defense?
- Could he have stood up for his faith without putting himself in danger? How or why not?
- How do you think Saul could have ignored the injustice of Stephen's stoning? How do you think he justified his participation?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage:

- How can people use social media to express their support for justice?
- What are some other ways to show support or inspire action for justice?
- What is the difference between standing up for justice in God's name or just advocating for some change?
- What just causes do you care about enough to face with boldness?



Exit

Invite participants to name some issue of justice they care about and to pledge to stand up for or against it, even in the face of discomfort or unpopularity. Close your time together with prayer.





Session Objective

As disciples our call is to be the hands of God at work in the world. Participants will explore what it means to be God's instruments in the world.

Faith Statement

God has reached out to those who suffer injustice, and defended the excluded, the poor, and the hungry. The Lord is moving toward the time when justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. We are persuaded God is at work here and now when people deal fairly with each other and labor to change customs and structures that enslave and oppress human beings.

Declaration of Faith, 8.3



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Why might God prefer that we help people in need rather than God doing everything on God's own?
- How does the belief that God could do anything God wants affect your faith?
- When has God used you to help someone else? When has God used someone else to help you?
- Do you believe that God ever helps people on God's own? How might God do that? Why doesn't God do that more often?



Explore

Read Amos 5:15, 18-24, and explore these questions:

- According to this Scripture passage, what does God really want us to do?
- According to this Scripture passage, what other things do people tend to think God wants?
- Why might God be so inefficient as to choose for us to do justice and be righteous?
- Is it always obvious how God wants us to do justice? Do you think God expects us to understand, clearly and immediately, how to do justice?
- Why might God want us to learn as we go? If God expects us to learn as we go, do you think God is more or less likely to forgive our mistakes? If God expects us to learn as we go, do you think God has more or less patience when we are frustrated and doubt God's plans?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage:

- How would you tell "those who suffer injustice" that God is reaching out to them? If they didn't believe you, how would you try to convince them?
- What are some of the biggest issues of justice that people have not yet solved?
- What are the hardest problems of justice for humans to address? Can we ever fix or solve those problems on our own to make the world a better place? How, or why not?



Exit

To end the session, discuss your frustrations at not being able to fix the world fast enough, and encourage each other to hold hope that God is working powerfully. Close your time together with prayer.

