**CONNECT WITH NEIGHBORS DURING COVID-19?**

Have you ever stopped to think that maybe it’s not an accident you live where you live? In the specific house where you live. On the specific lot that it sits? In the specific neighborhood where you live. In the town where you live? You say “of course it’s not an accident. We looked a long time for that apartment, or shopped a long time for that house. And we were pretty specific. It was the only one that fit what we were looking for. Of course, it’s not an accident.”

Have you ever thought maybe God had a purpose for that house being that house in that neighborhood and coming on the market at that time so that you would live in it? That He might have a plan for you living in that place at this moment in history because of something He’s doing in your life and maybe in the lives of the people around you?

What if God has a purpose for where you live inside of His purpose for you and the people around you? What if He’s placed you where He’s placed you because He’s doing something right where you live – wanting to show and tell people where you live who He is – and He wants to use you to be a part of it? And, what if it’s not as difficult, or as weird, or as religious, or as scary as you’re afraid it might be to be a part of what God’s doing right where you live?

Our lives have been significantly altered in an effort to limit the spread and impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Being diligent to practice social distancing and following the guidelines established by public officials is vital to our own safety and to the safety of others.

However, as we continue to engage in physical distancing practices, it’s important to note that there is a big difference between social distancing and social isolation. Isolation and loneliness negatively affect our mental and physical health, as well as overall well-being. Most of us have experienced a dramatic change in the amount of face to face interactions we have with people at work, schools, and church. At the same time, more people are out walking and playing in our neighborhoods than ever before. As a result, we have a unique opportunity to build connections with the people that live near us that will make a big difference in their lives, and in ours. The key is learning how to do this from six feet away!

This resource is designed to provide safe and practical ideas for neighboring during this unique moment that we find ourselves in. “COVID informed neighboring” is the antidote to the isolation and loneliness that social distancing can lead to. There has never been a better time to meet and connect with the people who live right outside your front door.

*"Right now, we don't need churches to create a bunch of new programs. What we need is for the people who attend those churches to simply be good neighbors and to do it in a careful and thoughtful manner."*

**Karen Gieseker, Infectious Disease Epidemiologist, PhD, MS, MT**

**FIRST STEP AND NEXT STEPS**

1. **REACH OUT TO YOUR NEIGHBORS VIA EMAIL OR PHONE**

If you do not have their information, leave a note on their door explaining who you are, where you live, and how they can get in touch with you. Be sure to wash your hands to keep everyone safe.

1. **WHEN YOU SEE PEOPLE OUTSIDE... MAKE IT A POINT TO TALK TO THEM**

One-minute conversations are a big deal when it comes to building relationships in our neighborhood. Use the Block Map visual included below to write down and remember the names of your neighbors.

1. **ASK YOUR NEIGHBORS HOW THEY ARE DOING**

Asking simple questions is more important now than ever.

* How are you and your family doing in light of all of the changes?
* How has this impacted your job and your company?
* Have you noticed any silver linings as a result of the adjustments that this crisis has forced us all to make?
* Is there anything that you need or that I could help with?
* What are you and your family doing for fun these days?

Real relationships are two-way streets-don’t hesitate to ask for help and to show how you are feeling and doing.

1. **BUILD A NEIGHBORHOOD DIRECTORY**

Compile contact information of the people that live in closest proximity to you and share it with everyone. Include names, addresses, phone, email, and even the names of children and/or pets if possible. Nextdoor.com is also a great tool to help with this, [learn more on their site](https://blog.nextdoor.com/2020/03/18/nextdoor-launches-help-map-and-groups-to-bring-neighbors-together/)

**BEST PRACTICES AND IDEAS**

**VIRTUAL MEET UPS/TRIVIA NIGHT**

Host a virtual gathering with your neighbors. Use Zoom, Google Hangout, etc to connect with the people who live on your street or in your apartment complex. Or use a video conferencing service to host a trivia game with your neighbors. There are lots of great apps and resources that provide fun questions and content.

**NEIGHBORHOOD SIT INS or FIRE PIT**

Have everyone bring their own chairs and favorite beverage of choice. Be sure to space everyone six to ten feet apart as you enjoy a nice conversation in an outdoor setting. Consider moving your Fire Pit to the front lawn or driveway and invite neighbors to gather around it.

**SOCIAL DISTANCE WALKS**

Take a walk with your neighbor(s) while staying 6-10 feet from each other. This may seem awkward at first but it’s a great way to model distancing to others while getting some healthy exercise.

**OUTDOOR MOVING NIGHT**

Use a white sheet stretched between boards and create an outdoor movie screen and a projector/sound system or bring a portable big screen TV outside on a rolling cart. Invite a couple neighbors over, have them bring their own chairs, favorite beverage and you supply the equipment and movie!

**CARING FOR OLDER + AT RISK NEIGHBORS**

* Reach out to these neighbors specifically over the phone or email. If you don’t have their contact information, knock on their door, take a few steps back, and introduce yourself, it may be wise to wear a face mask while doing this.
* Offer to help them learn technology that might be beneficial in connecting them to their families or others in the neighborhood. And offer to help them make connections with neighbors they may not have met yet.
* Ask them if there is an errand that you can run for them or anything that they need. Be sure to go the extra-mile concerning safety precautions. Wash your hands and after delivering an item.
* Set a reminder on your phone to check in with them on a regular basis.

[**COVID-19 ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES (CDC.GOV)**](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html)

It is crucial to follow the CDC instructions at all times when interacting with neighbors. Following these guidelines is the best thing we can do to protect ourselves and the most vulnerable among us.

* Wash your hands with soap and avoid touching your face.
* Avoid close contact. Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from others.
* Cover coughs and sneezed.
* Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others.
* Limit touches to hard surfaces others may have touched and clean and disinfect surfaces when in doubt.
* Monitor your health. If you are not healthy, self-quarantine and avoid contact with others.
* Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.

**SAMPLE NEIGHBOR NOTE**

My name is Joe Smith and I live two doors down from you at 5577 Park Street. I just want you to know I am willing to help if you need anything or just simply need someone to talk to. My family and I feel healthy and we will be sure to wash our hands and wear a face mask if there is anything you might need us to bring. It would be great to talk on the phone or text message you when you have a chance. My cell phone number is 444-555-4444.

**SAMPLE NEIGHBOR EMAIL**

Hey Neighbors,

As a result of coronavirus we are all adjusting to a new way of living. A few of us in the neighborhood have been talking about how we can help one another during this time and I wanted to pass along the following information and ideas.

* If you are older or have health issues and are concerned about going out and running errands, know that there are a handful of your neighbors who are willing to run errands and leave things on your doorstep. The people who are willing to do this will only so if we are 100% healthy and we will be sure to wash our hands wear face masks while handling anything that is delivered. Please email me if you are interested in something along these lines. There are a number of us who now have a lot of time on our hands and would be honored to help.
* As school wraps up for this season, and many return to work, it could be helpful to share info for people willing to help with children. We are putting together a list for our neighborhood to assist with these needs as well.
* I have attached an updated contact list for everyone on our street. Feel free to use this info to reach out to each other regularly.

Let me know if you have any needs or ideas on how to work together during this time. I’m grateful to live on a street where we know each other and can help each other in times like this!

**THE ART OF LISTENING**

You have likely heard someone make the distinction between hearing and listening. The New York Times did an article about this difference and pointed out that unlike all of our other senses, hearing is something that never stops.  Unlike our sight, which shuts off while we sleep, we continue to hear. And yet, the article points out that we are a society that is dangerously close to losing the art of listening as a result of digital distraction and the never-ending supply of information. So what’s the difference between people who hear and those people who truly listen?

**Attention**

It’s not a superpower. It’s not something for which we can claim we don’t have the gift. The difference between hearing and listening is simply paying attention. The problem is that through habit, we train ourselves to tune out certain sounds from others. And if you are like me, you might have to confess that when it comes to listening to my neighbors, both in what they say and what I see, I’m not as attentive as I know God wants me to be. For many of us this habit of listening starts simply with being aware, of intentionally seeking out conversations and relationship with our neighbors, of being observant of both what they are saying and what they are communicating nonverbally. There is something truly powerful about giving the gift of our attention.

**Asking good questions**

When we have opportunities for conversation with our neighbors, we often ask superficial questions. Instead we could think about open-ended questions that can lead to more meaningful conversations.  Some of my favorites are “What’s your story?”  “What kind of things do you do for fun?”  “What’s your spiritual background?” Asking good questions can lead to knowing people better and figuring out how to love and serve them well.

Good listening is a habit we all can practice! Begin praying, “God, help me to attentively listen for the needs and interruptions of those around me.  And graciously invest by asking questions.”

**Simple questions for getting to know your neighbors**

1.     How would you define success in life?  Why do you define it that way?

2.     What kinds of things do you do for fun?  When is the last time you did that?

3.     Tell me more about your story –what is your background?

4.     Tell me about your major in college.  Why did you choose to study that?

5.     Tell me about your family.  How do you stay connected with them?

6.     What has been your experience with the church/Christianity?

## **TOP 10 REASONS TO CONNECT**

## **WITH NEIGHBORS**

1. It's Biblical. In Matthew 22:39 Jesus says “Love your neighbor.” Obviously, He had a bigger context in mind – anyone near you who needs you. But the bigger context includes the smaller context too, doesn’t it? If a person sleeps 40 feet from you every night, they qualify as near you.
2. Everybody has one. Every single person from 3 months old to 103 years old has someone who lives near them. The message applies to everybody.
3. It's nearby. I don't have to get in a car to be a part of what God is doing. I can be a part of what He’s doing in a place I'm already going today. Nothing wrong with getting on a plane, but I can’t do it every day. I can go to my neighborhood every day.
4. It's repetitive. I'm going there every day. The relationships I develop aren’t haphazard or accidental.
5. It’s gradual. Because neighboring is nearby and repetitive, I can invest in the lives of others over time rather than feeling the need to do try to rush the process.
6. I’m not alone. Your next-door neighbors have other next-door neighbors. Some of them may be looking to connect with neighbors too and may be wired differently than you.
7. It’s low-intensity high-visibility. In a world where followers of Jesus tend to be caricatured and stereotyped, neighboring gives every non-Christian access to the anti-type for the stereotype. Neighboring lets every non-Christian in your neighborhood know at least one normal Christian.
8. It's not at a church. Some people in your neighborhood would never show up at your church They won’t show up at church, but they’ll show up at your house for a fire pit or outdoor movie, where they know they’re not going to be uncomfortable.
9. Everybody needs somebody sometimes. Someday, the people who live near you are going to need something. Maybe something profound like a shoulder to cry on during a tragedy, but probably something simple like a weed-eater or cup of sugar. And… someday you’re going to need those things too. Why not live in the kind of place where people love each other, and when those moments come nobody has to wonder where to go.
10. It's really, really fun.  Seriously, we’re not talking about inviting people over and preaching to them. We’re talking about inviting people over for a barbecue, throwing neighborhood parties, having real conversations across the fence or on the front porch, working on projects together, or starting a book club. The things you already enjoy doing with people you’ll find out you really like. Neighboring is a blast.

**CREATE YOUR OWN BLOCK MAP**

It’s true that when Jesus commands us to love our neighbor in Luke 10, He defines neighbor as “anyone near you who needs you.” But you and I pass a whole lot of “anyones” every single day and many of them have needs. Since we can’t meet all their needs, most of us meet none of their needs. Especially when the people around us don’t seem to have obvious needs like the unconscious guy laying by the side of the road in the Good Samaritan story. “When we aim for everything, we hit nothing.”

If we’re not careful, we turn Jesus’ command into a philosophy that sounds good, but that we have absolutely zero intention (or ability) of actually obeying… the exact opposite of the attitude Jesus was arguing for in telling the Good Samaritan story.

Maybe we need a baby step. Enter the Block Map.

It’s awfully hard to love someone if you don’t know their name, so begin there. Think about the 8 actual neighbors who live closest to you and make it your goal to write down all their names on your block map. That may mean an awkward “Hey, we’ve been living here 12 years and haven’t ever met” conversation, but that’s okay. If you think about it, a situation like that is awkward whether you name it or not!

As you go along, you can add relevant information about their family, occupations, hometowns, or hobbies that may help you keep from asking the same small-talk questions over and over. Post the map somewhere obvious so you see it and remember who you can pray for and who you need to meet.

Most people, when they start, can only name every person in one or two of the eight neighboring houses and that’s ok. Everyone needs to start somewhere.

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