



A PASTOR'S GUIDE FOR NEIGHBORING



For the past several decades, the American Church has adhered to a largely attractational model in its attempts to increase membership. Programs and events are offered to encourage the attendance of non-members in the hope of securing their continuing involvement in the congregation. Sunday services are carefully orchestrated to be attractive to the visitor, with special emphasis placed on the worship service and the children's programs. Even the buildings are designed to attract, utilizing contemporary signage and carefully worded marquees to catch the eye of those passing by.

But this effort has come at a high price. Both pastors and staff are feeling the increased pressure to continually come up with new approaches in order to expand attendance. Among those who do attend, discipleship is decreasing, leading to less effort from those in congregations to reach the unreached of the surrounding community. This places even more pressure on leadership as members constantly turn to staff as principally responsible for interacting with neighbors and for spreading the gospel message. As a result, churches are closing at an unprecedented rate in American history. According to George Barna, an average of about ten churches a day close their doors, never to re-open. And more dramatic still, between 3.5 and 4.0 million Americans stop attending church every year!

However, the American Church appears to have entered a new season. Across the nation, people are becoming engaged in an ever-increasing movement outside the established church, focusing on the neighborhoods surrounding individual church members. This incarnational model of going into the world and loving one's actual neighbor has resulted in the church transitioning away from the Attractional Model towards a more Incarnational Model. And with this increase in emphasis on neighborhoods, we have begun to see a corresponding increase in neighborhood groups.

In closing, we feel it necessary to acknowledge that there is an apostolic work taking place during this season of transition that covers multiple cities. It is a work that crosses geographic boundaries and is conducted by people who have a heart for developing neighboring ministries on a large scale. Like Paul, they move between cities, encouraging local leadership to engage in this new move of God. We have identified this simply as **Multi-City Neighboring**—the work of modern-day apostles who seek to bring the Kingdom of God to city after city across this nation.

— Bruce Zachary, Pastor of Calvary Nexus Camarillo, CA

Neighboring Objective

To obey the Lord's Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and His New Commandment (John 13:34-35, 1 John 4:7-12) to fulfill His Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to advance His Kingdom.

Neighboring Obstacles

- Busyness and/or Isolation characterize, for the most part, those in our cities today.
- Busyness of people in the church—they don't have margin in their lives for loving their neighbors.
- Perceived fear and the idea that we have never done church this way before.
- Attractional church culture (existing church structure, events, and programs) is contrary to the Neighboring Objective—the commands of our Lord.
- Certain members in congregations will oppose it, because it interrupts their lifestyle.
- The enemy is dead set against the Neighboring Objective.

Neighboring Prayer Support

Prayer is essential for the advancement of God’s kingdom and overcoming obstacles the enemy will throw at pastors and leaders. I strongly urge you to read *Combat Prayer* and establish a prayer team that will stand with you as you move your congregation into neighboring.

—*Combat Prayer: Weapons for Advancing God’s Kingdom*— Anthony Rodriguez

- Ask God to help you call, assemble, and pray with a group of dedicated intercessors and participants on a regular basis.
- Ask God to cause your people to see their neighbors through Christ’s very own eyes.
- Ask God to move in your heart and in the hearts of your people, so that each of you are overwhelmed by His great love for the lost.
- Ask God to compel each of you into actions on behalf of your neighbors, so that His love is heavy on your hearts.

Neighboring Plan

Loving neighbors starts with God’s great compassion for those who live in neighborhoods where he has placed us. It is no accident that we live where we do, it is by God’s design (Acts 17 26—27). It is his intention that we reach out and love our neighbors next-door, because he has commanded us to do so. Therefore, it’s only reasonable that God will speak to pastors and leaders about its import and the Holy Spirit will direct his shepherds to encourage their people to love their neighbors. This direction by the Holy Spirit will manifest itself in many forms, but most importantly it will start with a conviction in the heart of a shepherd that this is a mandate from God. As the apostle Paul states, “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” Once you have gained this conviction about the importance of the Great Commandment—to love God and love neighbor, the Spirit will begin to lead you to accomplish what is on the Father’s heart for your people with their neighbors. What follows is a helpful guide that you may choose to use to help establish your plan for neighboring with your church, house church, or small group.

VIM Formulae—Dallas Willard points out in *Renovation of the Heart* that the VIM Formulae is the general pattern of all human accomplishments. VIM is explained in this way:

- Vision — What I would like to accomplish or a desired goal.
- Intention — A desire and commitment to work toward the desired vision.
- Means — The method or plan to accomplish my vision.

Example — Learning a language— You must be motivated to learn a language.

Vision — I want to learn Spanish so that I can communicate with people in Spain.

Intention — I intend to study Spanish three evenings a week until I leave for Spain.

Means — I am going to use the Rosetta Stone system to learn Spanish.

Example — Neighborhood Initiative

Vision — The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole City One Neighborhood at a time.

Intention — I am highly motivated and plan to move forward as long as I am able.

Means — Coaching pastors and leaders, teaching on it, writing related books, employing social media, helping the Valley Vineyard, and loving my neighbors.

Starting a neighboring movement in your church and/or city

- Vision — A concrete plan for neighboring in your church—what you envision it to look like or your dream for what neighboring will look like with your congregation.
- Intention — A commitment to work your plan so your vision becomes a reality and becomes sustainable. You must be motivated.
- Means — A method or approach for bringing about a desired objective.

Once you have established a prayer team to support your work, a concrete vision, and a commitment to the vision the Lord has given you, it is time to plan or establish the *means* to carry out your vision. Keep in mind, I am only giving you a guide. You and your leadership team will need to be led by the Holy Spirit to carry this forth.

Means

1. Establish a leadership team

- The first step in moving things forward is a need for a leadership team that is wholeheartedly committed to the vision the Lord has given you. The team will be essential in leading your church. Team members will be the influencers and leaders of the movement among your people.
- Every church/congregation/house church/small group is different so there is no one way to put together a team. You must determine how this works best for your setting.
- I recommend, once you establish your team, that you have your team read one of the neighboring books available (see resources below) to acclimate them to neighboring.

2. Educate your people

- Over a year or two teach “line upon line” (marinate) about the importance of loving neighbors.
- Many are used to teaching something for six weeks and then go on to another series. If you do this with loving neighbors, you will not see a neighboring movement among your people.
- You will need to keep reemphasizing its importance in your teaching or your people will lose sight of the vision.
- The intent of your teaching is to lead your people to be obedient to the Lord’s Great Commandment, his New Commandment, and the Great Commission. This requires your people to become living sacrifices, to have their minds transformed to obey these commands (Romans 12:1—2), and to be sensitive to the Spirit’s leading.
- You are equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry where God has placed them (Ephesians 4:11—16).

3. Elevate Loving God and Neighbor

- Establish your vision “To Love God and Love Neighbor.”
- It’s on your website

- Bulletin
- Stories
 - From the pastor and the people (in person and/or video)
- Example- Bruce Zachary
 - 1) Ten-year vision- To have 200 neighborhood groups with people living in proximity to where the groups meet.
 - 2) His vision is stated in the front of his Auditorium- *Love God and Love Neighbor.*
 - 3) In the lobby his vision is emphasized.
 - 4) T-shirts- LOVE GOD. LOVE NEIGHBOR. (Repeat)
 - 5) Billboard- LOVE GOD. LOVE NEIGHBOR. (Repeat)



4. Eliminate

- Church events and programs can often be obstacles to neighboring.
- Create margin in the church for loving neighbors.
- Eliminate those activities that keep your people from having time for loving their neighbors.
 - Two ways to do this:
 - 1) Move some of these events into the neighborhood.
 - 2) As you emphasize the vision, *slowly* drop certain programs and events that don't line up with your vision for neighboring.
- Encourage those in your congregation to create margin in their own lives for loving their neighbors. Ask them what they can eliminate.

5. Examples to consider

Neighboring Models

Check the model(s) you would like to incorporate into your church or city.

- **Neighboring Model-** A believer starts neighboring in their neighborhood based on what they may have learned from one of the neighboring books, a church's emphasis, a pastor's teaching, a friend, or the Spirit's prompting. It might start out of an existing church small group and organically begins to grow in the neighborhoods where those in the group live.
 - Jim Lloyd The Bridge Fresno, CA (See Jim's story and how he went about starting a Neighboring Model in his neighborhood in *The Incarnational Church*, p. 131—134.)
 - Gary and Charlene Miller, Boise, Idaho— (Charlene's story in *The Kairos Adventure*, p. 77—82)

Resources:

— *Neighborhood Initiative and the Love of God* and *The Kairos Adventure*— Lynn Cory—neighborhoodinitiative.org
— *The Art of Neighboring*—Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak—artofneighboring.com
— The Neighboring Church— Brian Mavis and Rick Rusaw
— *Life on Mission*—Matt Svajda—missionfiduciacomunity.com

- **Neighborhood Regional Church Model** – Those from a congregation working together to show the love of God to neighbors nearby where a congregation meets for worship. This model provides training for those who have not been involved in loving their own neighbors. This model differs from the Neighborhood Proximity Church Model in that those from a church do not necessarily live in close proximity to where the congregation meets. This model may also serve as a training context to prepare people in a congregation to love their actual neighbors. This model allows those from a church to work together with others in their congregation to get a feel for neighboring. We did this at the Valley Vineyard over ten years ago when we started Neighborhood Initiative, then called Mission: Reseda. It helped some who were timid to build confidence so they could begin to love their own neighbors. We had a lot of fun doing this. During the training, we had three groups: 1) Prayer Team 2) Kindness Teams, and 3) Door-to-Door Teams. The Prayer Team covered our time in neighborhoods in prayer. The Kindness Teams were actively involved in serving those in the neighborhoods. The Door to Door Team would connect with neighbors and ask them three questions: 1) If you were a part of a church, what would you like it to be like? 2) Do you or anyone in the neighborhood have any needs that we can help with (The Needs were passed on to the Kindness Team)? 3) Do you or anyone in your family have anything we can pray for (Many asked for prayer)? We found that the only neighborhoods where neighboring continued was where there were believers living in the neighborhood to carry it on.
— Lynn Cory- Neighborhood Initiative’s Mission: Reseda— For more information about this, go to neighborhoodinitiative.com/about-us/ and click on Download Mission Guide.
— Jeff Fischer- Hope Chapel, Winnetka, CA— You can read his story in *The Incarnational Church*, pages 153—158.

- **Neighborhood Proximity Church Model** - Saturating the immediate neighborhoods around where the church gathers with neighboring (loving neighbors). Instead of the more common regional church model, this kind of congregation targets a very specific locale that not only includes homes and apartments, but schools, and businesses as well. Leadership and congregation members, for the most part, live in the immediate neighborhoods. Thus, the focus is turned towards loving those in the immediate vicinity—to see the Kingdom of God manifested in their own community.
— Joe White Neighborhood Church Fresno, CA (For a closer look go to <http://www.neighborhoodchurchfresno.com/> or contact Joe.) You can read his story in *The Incarnational Church*, Pages 139—144.

- **Neighborhood Group Model-** Geographic saturation of a community with neighborhood groups.

Geographic groups draw participants from a location or region that all share in common. Also shared in common is the desire to love their neighbors. A Neighborhood Group may consist of all believers or a mix of believers and unbelievers. This type of group can come into existence in a variety ways: 1) leadership of an existing congregation decides to close their existing affinity groups and establish groups that have a geographic focus, or establish new small groups with a geographic focus while maintaining their existing affinity small groups; 2) a new church plant may choose to establish one or more neighborhood groups before initiating a larger gathering of all church members.

— Bruce Zachary, Calvary Nexus Camarillo, CA (Resource: Go to Bruce’s story and vision below*)

- **Multi-Church Neighborhood Group Model-** In this case, the group consists of people attending different churches who all live in the same neighborhood. The intention is to simply to pray together and/or to study the Bible and for the purpose of loving their neighbors and proclaiming the Lord’s Kingdom. This model is a “bottom up” approach with no central leadership from an established congregation.

— Shawn and Carla Caldwell, Neighborhood Prayer Meeting (Read from *The Incarnational Church*, Chapter 20, pages 127—129 about Shawn and Carla’s prayer meeting.)

— Lynn and jo Cory, Neighborhood Discovery Bible Study (Read from *The Kairos Adventure*, Chapter 34 about Lynn’s Bible study.)

- **A Neighboring Network of House Churches** – In some respects, this model resembles the Geographic Neighborhood Group; however, unlike the single group, there is central leadership that oversees the network. Each house church targets a specific neighborhood, and the network joins together for fellowship on a monthly basis. Obviously, house churches are not burdened with the preoccupation of maintaining a church structure, and therefore, the network finds it easier to multiply. This type of flexibility results in greater opportunities to invest in building relationships rather than physical structures.

Glen Taylor— You can read his story in *The Incarnational Church*, Chapter 22, pages 135—138.

Gordon Howell and Mejia House Church Plant
Francis Chan, House Church Network

— *Neighborhood Initiative and the Love of God and The Kairos Adventure*— Lynn Cory—neighborhoodinitiative.org

— *The Art of Neighboring*—Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak—artofneighboring.com

— *Life on Mission*—Matt Svajda—Missionfiduciacomcommunity.com

- **A Citywide Neighboring Model**—A number of churches working together to saturate a city with neighboring.

This model goes beyond a single congregation, establishing a network of pastors and leaders who share a common desire to see their respective congregations and organizations unite to love the people of their city into relationship with Jesus Christ. Typically, there are one or two leaders called by God to initiate this kind of work. These leaders share a Kingdom mindset and understand that no one congregation can bring transformation to a city; that it requires the combined efforts of multiple churches working together in a city to bring this about. Corporate prayer among pastoral leaders is essential to the success of this model.

— Art of Neighboring, Denver, CO is involved in a citywide movement. (go to www.artofneighboring.com to obtain resources) You can Read Dave Runyon’s citywide story in *The Incarnational Church*, Pages 121—125.

— Loving Our Neighbors— Paul Haroutunian and Alan Doswald are initiating a citywide neighboring model (go to <https://esali.org/loving-our-neighbors>) You can read Paul Haroutunian’s citywide neighboring story in *The Incarnational Church*, Pages 149—151.

— Chico Citywide Movement— Andrew Burchett— You can read his story in *The Incarnational Church*, pages 145—148.

— Love Camarillo— Bruce Zachary is involved in a citywide neighboring movement. (go to www.lovecamarillo.com)

- Hybrid Neighboring Model**— A church incorporates more than one of the above models when it starts out or later.

Models you would like to incorporate—

- The Kairos Adventure Model**— This model is a simple way to introduce a congregation to neighboring. Establish a group of people from your church who want to love their actual neighbors. Ask each member to begin to read through *The Kairos Adventure* gleaning from what those in the book have experienced in their neighborhoods. Read it like a daily devotional. Establish a regular time to meet. It could be once a week, twice a month, or once a month. Your gathering will consist of these three things: 1) A common meal; 2) Sharing with your group experiences you are having with your neighbors; 3) Pray together for one another and each other’s neighbors. (Hebrews 10:24—25)

- Other _____

Resources:

- *Neighborhood Initiative and the Love of God*— Lynn Cory (neighborhoodinitiative.org)
- *The Incarnational Church*— Lynn Cory
- *The Kairos Adventure*— Lynn Cory
- *The Art of Neighboring*— Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak (artofneighboring.com)
- The Neighboring Church— Brian Mavis and Rick Rusaw (theneighboringlife.com)
- *Life on Mission*—Matt Svajda (missionfiduciacomunity.com)

Work Sheet

Read Bruce's story and vision below before you get started. Seek the Lord for guidance about the direction you should take in getting started with neighboring. Then answer the following questions:

1. **Prayer Team**— Who should I have on my prayer team?
2. **Leadership Team**—Who should make up my leadership team?
3. **Model**— What model(s) should I use?
4. **VIM**

Vision— What is the vision the Lord is giving me for neighboring in my neighborhood, church, and/or city? With your vision, you might want to include your story as Bruce has with his vision and why you want to move neighboring forward with your church and possibly your city.

Intention— What kind of commitment do I want to give to it so that neighboring flourishes in neighborhoods with those in my church and city? Prayer, intentionality, and faithfulness will determine sustainability.

Means— What is the plan the Lord is giving me and what resources do I believe will be helpful as I move this forward? Include models that will work into your plan.

* **Neighborhood Group Model** Bruce Zachary of Calvary Nexus, Camarillo, California

Bruce's story and vision for geographic saturation of a community with neighborhood groups [NG]:

How I rediscovered the Great Commandments:

I remember meeting with Lynn Cory of "Neighborhood Initiative" to discuss a city-wide initiative to reach our community for Christ through "neighboring." It's always interesting and perplexing when a noun becomes a verb. And I really had no idea what the idea of "neighboring" really meant. I discovered that it was the simple idea of loving your actual neighbors. We talked at lunch about the likelihood of a city-wide multi-church effort in our community. I like Lynn (he's essentially impossible not to like) and respect him as a pioneer leader and godly man, but I know that it is challenging to coordinate multiple churches to a single initiative. At the time, I was beginning a two-year term to lead the Camarillo Ministerial Association [CMA] a group of about twenty evangelical churches. Even in our community, where we enjoy a great unity among evangelical churches, it would take time and energy to communicate and implement a multi-church vision for neighboring. At that time, our local church was about to engage in a process to seek a long-range vision and I didn't feel able to commit to a multi-church neighboring initiative.

As we enjoyed our barbeque lunch, Lynn invited me to attend a "Neighborhood Collective" gathering hosted at Valley Vineyard Church, where Lynn served, in Reseda, CA, a community of Los Angeles about thirty-five miles from my home. I agreed to attend, primarily to support Lynn, and not really feeling any call from God to neighboring. At the "Neighborhood Collective" conference there were speakers from various parts of the country and many attendees who were curious about neighboring. It was a nice event, and I discovered some of the history of the neighboring movement. Yet, I didn't feel a call to neighboring as an individual nor as a church-wide initiative at our local church during the event. Nevertheless, within hours or days of the Neighborhood Collective, I had the epiphany moment.

I came to discover that I was rebelling against God, and I had been completely ignorant of my condition. That realization of my rebellion cut right to my heart. I'd been a pastor for over twenty-five years and have been successful in that calling as the world measures success. The local church where I served had a reputation for solid Bible teaching, knowing good doctrine, loving one another, and serving others. As I considered my ministry and some of the characteristics that I associated with being Jesus' disciples, I generally referred to: Bible learning, prayer, serving, sharing your faith, reflection, giving, and loving others. The list isn't heretical, but here's the problem – it neglects the Great Commandments.

The Great Commandments (Matt. 22:37-39) require us to love God supremely and to love our *neighbor* as we love self. Jesus declared that these commandments are the essence of all that God has declared to man. Any reasonable interpretation of the commandment to love my neighbor should include those in geographic proximity (i.e. my actual neighbors). Yet, despite extensive theological training and ministry experience, I had missed it. Therefore, I was in unwitting rebellion against God. I realized that not only was I in rebellion against God, but essentially every pastor that I know was in the same condition.

Jesus came to bring forth a revolution to turn our world right-side up. The essence of the revolution is distilled to the revolutionary idea: love God supremely and love your neighbor as you love yourself. I presume therefore that if we were to do what He required us to do in the Great Commandments that we would advance the gospel, His kingdom, and the revolution. Unfortunately, in our effort to advance and support the revolution, we have created a plethora of ministry infrastructure at the local church. For example, the Tuesday night men's group, Wednesday night mid-week study, Thursday ladies' study, Saturday event (e.g. breakfast, service project, conference, youth fundraiser, etc.), and Sunday worship gatherings. This is a relatively typical model of local church life. Add to that schedule the activities the children are involved in such as music lessons, sports, or clubs and you can easily see why a Christian caught up in this dynamic has no margin to love their actual neighbors. The ministry at the local church that was intended to support Christ's revolution obscured the simple essence of the revolution.

Somehow, I was unaware of my rebellion. Our local church was impacting so many lives for Christ and influencing our community for the gospel, so I presumed we were doing good. We loved one another and loved others too. But I was so busy doing ministry and supporting ministries at our local church that *I didn't even know my neighbors let alone love them*. I could rationalize, justify, and deny my rebellion against God's commandments or admit my rebellion and repent. That's how I rediscovered the Great Commandments, and how I began a journey to live them.

How we sought to approach living the Great Commandments: The vision to saturate our community with gospel-centered neighborhood groups [NG].

At that time, our local church had just celebrated our twentieth anniversary. We had a strong foundation of making disciples and developing leaders. I was the founding and lead pastor, there had been considerable success, and there was a high degree of trust between the church and leadership. Our core pastor team was collectively seeking to discern God's direction for Calvary Nexus for the next ten years. We started to sense that we were called to saturate our community with gospel-centered small groups where people would become disciples and leaders would be developed. Since our church was approximately one and a half to two percent [1.5%-2%] of the entire City of Camarillo (a suburb in Southern California between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara), it appeared to be a God-sized vision and yet feasible as a ten-year vision.

I began to share with our core pastor team the idea of neighboring and suggested the possibility of incorporating the neighboring concept into our vision. Our five core pastors each had ten to twenty or more years of pastoral ministry experience, but none of them was familiar with the concept of neighboring. Yet, all of us were interested in the idea. Our next step was to purchase every book that we could find on the subject. Each of us read multiple books and prepared summaries that we shared with one another. After a few months of prayer, research, and discussion, we collectively felt called to neighboring.

We sensed Calvary Nexus' ten-year vision is to saturate our community with gospel-centered Neighborhood Groups [NG]. *A neighborhood group is a place where we learn to love God and neighbors better.*

Our Neighborhood Groups are the primary place where we learn to be Christ's disciples. The

goal is to make Jesus king in every realm of our lives: personal, marriage, family, community, career, and calling. Bible learning will develop Christ-like character. People are encouraged to befriend and build relationships with their neighbors where they live, work, study, and play. We discover how to share Christ's love in tangible ways.

Approximately four to five months prior to launching the vision, we began to prepare a vision brochure to help the church begin to understand the Neighborhood Groups and neighboring concepts [<http://calvarynexus.org/neighborhood-groups-vision>]. We began to develop a list of the frequently asked questions that we anticipated (and later received) [<http://calvarynexus.org/neighborhood-groups-faq>]. And we began to prepare training resources for NG leaders and participants [<http://calvarynexus.org/neighborhood-group-resources>].

We created a Neighborhood Group Study Guide template based on the Sunday Bible study (sermon) as a tool for groups. The study guide is distributed each Friday via email to a distribution list of about 2,000 people and is also available to download on the NG Resources tab. We want all our groups to adopt the Scripture- based (sermon- based) study guide, especially the sections regarding loving neighbors *outside and inside* their group.

Love your neighbor outside the group better:

- 1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?*
- 2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?*
- 3. Here is (are) a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:
As the weather is getting warmer, your neighbors are likely to spend more time outdoors. Plan to spend more time outdoors in your neighborhood too. Consider walks in the neighborhood, playing at a local park, or simply spending time in front of your residence.*

Love your neighbor inside the group better:

- 1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?*
- 2. What might we do about that need to help?*

By including the questions related to loving neighbors during each group gathering, it reinforces, encourages, and creates accountability to develop the core value of loving neighbors.

At that time, we also began to explore how we could begin to simplify church life (ministry, programs, etc.), and life generally, to create margin to invest in relationships with neighbors where we live, work, study, and play. We understood that we had to make the transition slowly in our context because we were a twenty-plus-year-old church with many established ministries. The transitions would likely take a couple of years. Nevertheless, we began to minimize the number of events on the church calendar starting in the second year of the vision. And approximately three months prior to launch, we discontinued our mid-week study and

encouraged all the attendees to participate in beta groups to test the NG study guides.

In starting test groups, we considered the concepts of geographic proximity and affinity. Traditionally, most small group ministry is based on affinity (common life interests or development). These might include singles, young marrieds with no children, young marrieds with toddlers, married empty nesters, senior adults, cycling, musicians, etc. An advantage of this approach is that the commonality of interests or life-stage often make it easier for people to connect with one another. On the other hand, neighboring flourishes in a context of geographic proximity. If people from a local church who live within a few blocks of one another gather, they have a common connection to the neighbors they are building relationships with. For example, my neighbor Phyllis shared with me that she wanted to visit the widow who lives a few blocks away but wanted someone to go with her. It was only natural for me to offer to go, because Phyllis' neighbor is my neighbor too.

We adopted a hybrid model of geographic proximity and affinity to leverage the best of both models. In this hybrid model, the foundation of the group is based on people living in geographic proximity with one another. And then participants are free to invite people to participate based on affinity regardless of geographic proximity. This model is intended to leverage the enhanced ease of connection created by affinity and the synergy of people living in geographic proximity connecting with common neighbors.

Finally, we communicated the vision to staff and leaders (elders, deacons, ministry leaders, and existing small group leaders) approximately six-months pre-launch. We encouraged each to begin to prepare margin in their lives to allow them to not only participate in a NG, but margin to befriend and build relationships with neighbors where they live, work, study, and play. We believe that for any church-wide initiative to be effective that all key leaders need to be committed (especially lead/senior pastors).

Some of the blessings we experienced when we lived the Great Commandments:

Once I rediscovered the Great Commandments, I began to live the value of loving my neighbors. The first change that I noticed was I began to go out of my way to talk with neighbors in our condominium (condo) parking lot. In the past, if I had seen my neighbors talking in the parking lot I would wave and pull into my garage and close the door. Now I was parking my car, going out of the garage, and going over to my neighbors to talk.

As I became aware of different struggles that my neighbors were experiencing, I would offer to help, or listen, or pray with (or for) them. I soon discovered that I was much more comfortable offering to help than asking for help. One day, I offered to help my neighbor with a handyman project even though I may be the least handy guy around. I was sincere in the offer, but God impressed upon me that I had to humble myself and learn to ask for help. I discovered that Christians can be perceived as proud in generally offering to help, but rarely asking for help. My willingness to ask for help was making me a better neighbor. And there was a wonderful sense that I was pleasing Jesus.

On another occasion, I had been on an epic bicycle ride. After the ride, I went to a local noodle house for a bowl of Ramen. The guy sitting next to me was a ramen guru. He knew enough

about ramen to write a blog. As we started talking about ramen, I explained that for the last twenty miles of my bike ride I'd been thinking about ramen. I soon discovered that he also rode a bike. So, we started chatting about cycling. Then I asked him about his work, and he politely reciprocated and asked what I did for work. That's when I got to tell him that I was a pastor and that I served at a church a few blocks from the noodle house.

I grabbed one of my business cards and handed it to him and invited him to be my guest at church. He looked at my card and said, "I'll probably never go to church, but I'll give you a call and we can go for a ride sometime." For the first time, I wrestled with the idea: would I be willing to invest hours of my time knowing that it was extremely unlikely that he would receive the gospel just to show the love of God? When I concluded that I would, there was an overwhelming feeling that I was being transformed.

There were also experiences that revealed how much I needed to grow. One morning, I was headed out to a meeting when I saw my neighbor in our condo parking lot. I asked, "How are you doing?" And my neighbor began to tell me. And tell me more, and then continue to tell me all about it. I realized that I was going to be late and I was becoming impatient (although trying my best not to appear impatient). Then I sensed the Lord whisper, "Loving your neighbor is not always going to be convenient." And I realized that I needed the Lord to change my heart to be more like His.

When one of our neighbors had become ill, my wife and I reached out to see if there were any needs that we could help with. Later, I sensed God urging me to invite my neighbor to lunch. I must confess that in my past, I don't ever recall inviting a neighbor who I had nothing in common with except geographic proximity to lunch. Yet, in a desire to please Jesus I found myself typing an email, "I'd love to take you to lunch and hear your story." I paused before hitting send, and recall thinking that the invitation would likely be declined or fall through the cracks, and in part that comforted me. Nevertheless, my invite was accepted and soon thereafter we were at lunch. And I'm able to report that it was a good experience, and I'm confident the Lord was pleased.

I was blessed to discover how rapid the transformation could be when we purpose to live the Great Commandments. Our condo-complex has an annual Christmas Party. For years I neglected to attend, because there was always something going on at church that was a bigger priority, or I simply felt too tired to deal with people at a party. About six months after seeking to love my neighbors, I purposed to attend our neighborhood Christmas party. During the evening, one of our neighbors said, "Bruce you're a really good neighbor." Six months earlier, I don't believe I was a good neighbor. I didn't play loud music all night, have crazy parties, or leave trash in front of my condo, but I didn't really care about, let alone love my neighbors. By the grace of God, I had been transformed in six months. And I reflected that it had been one of the most satisfying times of my life and ministry. There weren't any monumental huge projects or initiatives, but there was the uniquely satisfying glory of simply living the Great Commandments.

I was blessed to see the rapid transformation of others in our Neighborhood Group too. Here is one of countless stories. One night we closed our group gathering with a time of prayer for our neighbors. As we concluded, one of our friends had a tear rolling down her cheek, and I asked

her what was wrong. She explained, “All of you are praying for neighbors by name and I’ve lived in the same place for years and don’t even know my neighbors.” Within a few weeks, she started to share with our group that she had noticed that her neighbors would retrieve their mail around the same time. So, she started to meet neighbors and build relationships by being purposeful to wait at mail time.

Some of the obstacles we encountered, and some lessons we learned as we sought to overcome those challenges:

The first challenge was, “What is neighboring?” The concept was unfamiliar, and unfortunately people were afraid. There was a perceived fear that people would be expected to “immediately” share the gospel with neighbors or open their homes to them. We anticipated the fear and addressed it by encouraging people to *begin* by simply befriending and building relationships with neighbors where they live, work, study, and play. We sought to help people to understand that over a course of time, sharing the gospel or opening their home would be great, but not to worry about it and to allow God to direct the process. We found it helpful to create a list of FAQs to help people discover neighboring.

A second obstacle is busyness. There was simply too much going on in people’s lives for them to build relationships with neighbors. Much of the busyness relates to church life, and people are used to and comfortable with that culture. People are resistant to change. We realized that changing culture or values generally takes at least two to three years. We committed to the process and sought to adopt a BBQ approach – “low and slow.” The pressure to make changes would be low and the process slow (by the way, that approach is generally very uncharacteristic for me). We encouraged people to seek to create margin in their lives that would allow them time to love God and neighbors better. The pressure to join a NG was especially low during the first year of launching the vision. Nevertheless, we want people to consider their *next step(s)*:

1. Belong: Participate in a Neighborhood Group.
2. Become: Grow as a disciple and/or leader prepared to lead a Neighborhood Group.
3. Befriend: Befriend and build relationships, and share Christ’s love where you live, work, study and play.

A third challenge is to keep loving God as the priority when you are spending an increased amount of time talking about loving neighbors. We try to be very intentional to remember to communicate that love for neighbors is a natural (supernatural) byproduct of love for God; real love for neighbors cannot be produced independently.

A fourth hurdle is to distinguish loving God and neighbors as values rather than another program or project of the church. When we share God’s love with neighbors it is a demonstration of our love for God, and not a program to share the gospel, and then make our unsaved neighbor a project. Nevertheless, the gospel is the greatest demonstration of love. Ultimately, we want to share the gospel, as the Spirit leads, and not reduce love to random acts of kindness.

The fifth challenge related to our existing small groups. These were groups that had formed under a different paradigm and may have been resistant to adopting the Neighborhood Group model and the values of loving God and neighbors better. We approached the issue by sharing

the vision with existing group leaders about four months pre-launch. We wanted the existing leaders to have time to process and ask questions. We chose not to mandate adoption. Instead, we looked to develop a coalition of those willing that would influence the hesitant, and ultimately the resistant. Within six months of launch, more than eighty percent (80%) of the groups were aligned.

The sixth challenge was to keep neighboring in focus. Along with reducing competing ministry at the church, we use stories to keep us focused. Starting approximately five to six months post-launch, we created space in our weekend gatherings for people to share their stories of neighboring. This includes live and simple videos from leaders and people in the congregation that are shared prior to the Bible teaching (message) most weekends. The stories from people in the congregation can be messy but are perceived as having greater weight than church leaders' stories, because they tend to empower the typical congregant.

Conclusion: We are new to neighboring, and our approach is certainly not the only way to engage in a church-wide initiative to live the Great Commandments. We hope that by sharing our experience it will encourage you and those that you influence to discover the satisfaction of advancing God's kingdom in your community, and the personal fulfillment that uniquely flows from living the Great Commandments.