

Series: DO OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Title: "Showing I Care for My NEIGHBORS"

Introduction: Good Morning, BMZ? And Merry Christmas! It's getting closer ... Does everybody have their shopping done? Me? NOPE! We're always kind of late Christmas people because of family birthdays on the 16th and 18th. When the kids were young, we waited to prepare for Christmas until after those special dates!! And we still kind of do that!!

We're talking today about showing care for our neighbors.... Anyone ever have one of THOSE neighbors? You know, there is the fella on the highway near Ellenboro who has all sorts of things written on his out buildings... like 'This is Deliverance'.... And some political things that aren't the nicest to see when you are driving by.... think about living next to him and seeing this graffiti all the time!! This morning, we continue our series, "Open Before Christmas" ... and today, we get to offer gifts to our neighbors that we need to offer them BEFORE CHRISTMAS! We are quickly running out of time, aren't we? So, we'd better get underway.

Anyone here ever watch Sesame Street? Back in the day, they had a great song they used to sing periodically ... "Bob" would come out and sing with a couple of the Muppets ... ***"Who are the people in your neighborhood ... in your neighborhood ... in your neighborhood... Say, who are the people in your neighborhood? The people that you meet each day!"*** Remember?!? Well, I thought we might play that game a bit today!

So, here is what we are going to do ... there is going to be a picture of a TV person or family up on the screen and you get to shout out the names of their NEIGHBORS! Got it? NOT them, but their neighbors!!

We'll start with an easy one and see how you do ... (Picture: Fred and Wilma Flintstone) Not bad ... that's right (Barney and Betty Rubble) ...

Okay, let's go back a way ... (Picture: The Clampetts' from Beverly Hillbillies) Answer: (The Drysdale) ... Nice!

Okay, a couple more ... (Picture: Tim the Tool Man Taylor) Answer: (Wilson)

Last one ... and the previous neighbor is a hint: (Picture: Cartoon Dennis the Menace) Answer: (Mr. Wilson).

So, again, ***"Who are the people in your neighborhood, in your neighborhood, in your neighborhood... Say, who are the people in your neighborhood ... The people that you meet each day!"***

IF you haven't already, grab your program ... *Take out your MESSAGE NOTES and CONNECTION card. You will see there are blanks to fill in ... Please take the time to do so. Get your pen and write down whatever else you think is important to you and your faith journey. Later on in worship, drop your CONNECTION CARD in the offering basket and take your MESSAGE NOTES home. Please Re-read the Scripture and the notes to keep growing and learning. For those of you on-line, you can go to our website, www.bmzchurch.org ... find the NOTES and follow along ... LET'S PRAY*

(turn off marked lights during prayer)!

Okay, so last week I was here too, and we talked about 5 Care Packages that we can offer our FAMILIES BEFORE CHRISTMAS ... This week: What can we offer our NEIGHBORS to OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS?

Now, we've already talked about "The Great Commission" = "Go into all the world and make disciples..." But, now we are going to go to Matthew 22 and again Jesus is locked in a conversation with the Religious Leaders... He has answered a couple of TRAP QUESTIONS and now the Pharisees are coming back with one more question to try to TRAP JESUS and make him look foolish so that the Pharisees could keep living life like they wanted without having Jesus challenge them and their religion.

So, the Sadducees just failed with their attempt to trap Jesus ... the Pharisees just rolled their eyes ... "don't send the Sadducees in to do a Pharisees' job!" So, here's what happens: One of their experts in religious law asks,

(Michelle – this Scripture all goes together as one for the screen!!)

Matthew 22:36-40 = ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"

(Now, before we go any further; please hear what this lawyer is asking. There are more than just the 10 Commandments that we know from Exodus and Deuteronomy. There are over 600 commandments that the Pharisees cited as Laws of Moses. The Pharisees debated this question all the time and they never came to a consensus on what was the most important. It's a TRAP QUESTION! In other words, if Jesus doesn't know the answer to this question, he must not be the Messiah and we can all quit listening to him!)

³⁷ Jesus replied, " 'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments. "

Jesus answers the question with two answers ... #1 = Love God with everything you've got! Jesus says, "This is the first and greatest commandment." Okay, they have their answer... BUT, Jesus kept talking!! He went on to say, "AND ... a 2nd is just as important". It's like 1A and 1B ... Love God with everything you've got, AND (1B) ... what did he say? "Love your neighbor as yourself". He didn't say ... "cure the diseases of the world"; He didn't say ... "end poverty"; He didn't say ... "be a perfect person" ... HE SAID, "LOVE your NEIGHBOR"!

Jesus argument is that if we learn to do these two commandments, all of the other 600+ Commandments will be taken care of!! Those will fall into place... ALL those Commandments are connected to these TWO!!

So, it's important to have a definition of "NEIGHBOR", right?! Who do we REALLY have to LOVE like OURSELVES?

Now when Luke tells this story, he says that someone asks Jesus the question: "Who is my Neighbor?" And Jesus answers...

Jesus tells the story/parable (story with a point) of the Good Samaritan. A Jewish man is walking the dangerous road between Jerusalem and Jericho (and everyone listening would have nodded and smiled ... they'd all heard stories) and he is attacked by robbers, everything stolen, beat up and thrown in the ditch. A priest comes by and looks and walks past. A Temple assistant (who would be a Levite) comes by and looks at the beat-up Jewish man and walks past on the other side of the road ... doesn't offer any help. Then, Jesus says, a third man walked by ... a Samaritan.

Remember. Jews and Samaritans did not get along ... there has been a long-time rift between them. But Jesus asks who was the good neighbor? Notice that all three men who passed by this robbed and beaten Jewish man on the side of the road were "ON THEIR WAY". They were on their way somewhere else and they had an opportunity to be a "Good Neighbor" and the Samaritan WAS a good neighbor and went above and beyond in caring for the Jewish man.

So, let's start with -- Definition: A NEIGHBOR is someone we meet "ON OUR WAY"...

My Neighbor: SOMEONE ON MY WAY

A few weeks ago, we talked about what gifts we might be able to give to someone who is IN NEED. For most of us, we know there are people in the world that are "IN NEED", but as long as we aren't reminded of them, we often don't think of them ... "out of sight; out of mind". A person in need is someone who is "OUT OF MY WAY"

Those In Need: SOMEONE OUT OF MY WAY

So, those in need we said a couple weeks ago were people in need who were OUT of our way. But today it's "NEIGHBORS" ... or, "someone ON my way." That could be a literal neighbor living next to you, like Fred and Wilma and Barney and Betty or the Clampetts and the Drysdales ... or a co-worker

... the person who serves you at the local restaurant ... the teller at the bank ... your nurse ... that person you pass in the grocery store every time you are there!!

So, our NEIGHBORS are people we PASS while we are ON OUR WAY ... wherever! Today, we want to talk about:

Four (4) Steps to Loving My Neighbor:

1. Ask God for a COMPASSIONATE HEART

It's not totally natural for us to care for people ON OUR WAY... we have family to care for, we have jobs to do, we have places to go. We have deadlines and the clock is ticking away.....

Sometimes our Neighbors are the people not only On Our Way, but "IN OUR WAY" ... it's an inconvenience to help them, isn't it! I'm in a hurry.... Heading to work or where ever I'm heading... I have enough people to take care of already.

Luke 6:36 = ³⁶ You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. ²

How is the Father compassionate? Think of the ways that God loves you even though you don't deserve it and how God offers forgiveness to people that don't deserve it! God gives us multiple chances to get things right--That's God being compassionate ... AND...as our memory verse last week taught us:

1 John 4:19 = ¹⁹ We love each other because he loved us first. ³

See, the more we experience God's love in our lives and realize the way God loves us REGARDLESS of how inconvenient that might be to God – can you hear God: "I have to forgive you for that AGAIN?!?! How many times is that?!?!" ... the more willing we are to be COMPASSIONATE to the people ON OUR WAY!!

BUT, it doesn't come natural for us ... with our tunnel vision focused on us -- we have to ASK GOD for a Compassionate Heart at times!

Psalms 139:23 = ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

What's in your heart?!

Here's the thing: You cannot just try harder to love other people. It doesn't work. You might be able to fake it for awhile, but true love and compassion comes from what God puts inside of us ... SO, pray to God to fill you with COMPASSION ... so #1 was Ask God for a COMPASSIONATE HEART!

2. Show GENUINE INTEREST

This means that you have to make an effort to show Genuine Concern about what is happening in your "Neighbors" lives ... those ON YOUR WAY. Make an effort to SHOW that you are genuinely concerned about what happens in their lives.

Most of us have gotten pretty good at "FAKING INTEREST", right?!? We kind of act like we care, but life is really too busy. So, we have short conversations (and these have to happen many times!!) ... Goes like this, "Hey, Rick, how's it going? (and we keep walking, because we know the answer)" Answer: "Great! How's it going with you?" Answer: "Great!" Conversation OVER!!

The problem comes when Rick messes up the system ... "Hey, Rick, how's it going? (keep walking because we know the answer)" Answer: "Not so good." And you say to yourself (not out loud) NOW WHAT?!?!? Rick just messed up the system!! Dude, we had this thing going where I said, "Hey how's it going?" and you said, "Great! How's it going with you?" and I said, "Great!" and we moved on with our day ... REMEMBER?!?!? Why did you have to mess up such a good thing?!

So, now you stop and ask, "What's going on?!?" And you hear for the first time that his wife left him or his child is really sick or he lost his job or his parent died or whatever it is that is going on in Rick's life... The Bible says not to fake interest in others ... I know it's not possible to hear everyone's story and still keep your job--that would be IMPOSSIBLE, but there have to be some people in our lives that we show

² Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 6:36). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

³ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (1 Jn 4:19). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

GENUINE INTEREST with. We read in **Romans 12:10** *Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.*⁷

One way to show GENUINE INTEREST is to Follow Up with people that you know things about or have had conversations with. If you know that they have started a new job, ask how it's going. If they just had a baby, try to ask the name and then ask how the baby is doing. If they share with you that something is going wrong in their life, offer to pray, and then check back and see how they are feeling or how the situation is going ... and keep praying.

So, #2 is In order to be a gift to our neighbor, SHOW GENUINE INTEREST. After asking God for a Compassionate Heart and showing Genuine Interest, that takes us to #3...

3. Be Alert to NEEDS

Be alert to people's needs ... I know SOME PEOPLE are just NATURAL at this, or so it seems! There are people out there that just love to serve others in their time of need, and they go and do it all of the time; BUT, for most of us ...

Question: How many of you know the needs of the person who lives next door to you? How many of you know the needs of the person who works next to you? How many of you know the needs of the person who you see at worship every week?

Sometimes we don't want to find out ... then I will have to take my time to do something about it! We're always going back to that TIME thing, aren't we? And it's also INCONVENIENT!! We've decided that to help out those people would be inconvenient, so it's better to just skip it!!

But, the Bible says that we ought to pay attention!

Galatians 6:7-8 = ⁷Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. ⁸Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.⁴

So, the Bible says that if we live a selfish life; not caring for the people around us, then you will have an empty, meaningless, purposeless life. Your life will only be "decay and death" ... nothing in it will be alive and well. BUT, if we live unselfishly; thinking about the people around us and showing GENUINE INTEREST and BEING ALERT to the NEEDS of the people "On Our Way", then we will be blessed with a **true, everlasting, life!!**

It matters how we think about the People On Our Way!

Question: Well, how do we know the needs of the people On Our Way?! Well, part of that is ASKING GOD FOR A COMPASSIONATE HEART and SHOWING GENUINE INTEREST ... the other part is that people who are in need have to, at some point, be willing to be vulnerable and share that they have a need! We as a church, like to be there to help as many people as we can, but WE CAN'T READ MINDS!! If you are hurting this morning, please make yourself vulnerable and let us help if we can. We have a "Help Team" and a "Food Pantry" and a "Giving Tree" and "Youth Group" and WNSS and growth groups looking to care and other people who like to help ... but again, most of us aren't able to read minds!

AND, we can't always help ... we would like to help everybody, every time; but it's not always feasible... but we'll try to make the right connections for helping!

AND, Don't forget to PRAY!!

Philippians 4:6 = ⁶Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done.⁵

There is power in prayer ... remember last week ... our piles ... We had a pile of what God would do whether we ask or not; a pile of stuff that God is never going to do no matter how much we pray; and a pile of stuff of things God is willing to do IF we will just ASK!! Please don't go without because you DIDN'T ASK!! Pray for each other and "expect great things!"

Okay, last one...

⁴ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ga 6:7-8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Php 4:6). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

4. Respond with **COMPASSIONATE ACTION**

It's not enough just to show interest and pray for compassion and find out people's needs and even to pray for them ... we need to look for ways to **RESPOND WITH COMPASSIONATE ACTION!!** In order to Care for my NEIGHBOR, at some point, I need to do something that will make a difference in their life ... or all this stuff is kind of empty...

James 2:14-17 = ¹⁴ *What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?* ¹⁵ *Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing,* ¹⁶ *and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?* ¹⁷ *So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.* ⁶

I love how James makes sure we know that love from a distance isn't really love at all. We must get with people and make a difference.

If you know someone who is in need this Christmas season ... and this season is so hard when you are in need ... If you know somebody that has a need, try to meet it. If you can't, ask around for who might be able to help ... Check with the Church! Help Team, Food Pantry, Giving Tree etc.

I know that one of our folks met a new Neighbor at the grocery store recently. A woman was checking out and when the bill was too big, she took some items and set them out.... she just did not have the money for them right now due to some other bills that had been taken care of in recent days. She got her bill to the point she could take care of.... Going without some of the items.... You guessed it. Yes... our folks had those items run through and they paid for it. Warms our hearts when we can see people caring for NEW neighbor's ON their way – just out shopping at the grocery store!!

Bloomington council met right after Thanksgiving – a good time to be thankful and we were able to give sizeable generous donations this year to our own Snack Sack Ministry that provides weekend snacks during the school year for 25 children through River Ridge school, and to Interhope – our BMZ ministry in SE Asia, as well as helping Operation Santa with 74 families in the River Ridge area this year.

I'd like to share the Interhope video again today.... The project we as BMZ Regional Ministry support yes, at Christmas time, BUT year round with sustainable solutions. Let's watch

[Interhope video here](#)

That is always soooooo touching.... and they have surely become our neighbors ON our way.

We need to continue to find ways to really care BEFORE CHRISTMAS and YEAR ROUND, for the people ON OUR WAY – our neighbors.....

Why? In John 13, Jesus teaches us with our memory verse for this day:

John 13:35 = **"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."**

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

Let's ask for a compassionate heart, let's show genuine interest, let's be alert to needs and let's us respond with compassionate action BEFORE Christmas and all year long! Let's Pray!

Next Steps: Memorize John 13:35

Pray and ask God for a Compassionate Heart for my Neighbors

Respond Compassionately to _____.

Show Compassion by giving to InterHope Missions for Sustainable Solutions

Hosting (Closing)

HEY, it has been a GREAT DAY here at BMZ...

Glad you've been here with us!

In a moment, we are going to

- RECEIVE the OFFERING so please take this time to finish COMPLETING any information
- Or NEXT STEPS on your CONNECTION CARD (**FULLY FILLED OUT!!**)

- AND when our ushers come around to RECEIVE our OFFERING
You can drop that card in the offering basket. YEP ... BOTH in the SAME BASKET!!

IF you are a First-Time Guest with us today

- We are so glad that you joined us ... And we have a GIFT for you.
It's a book called "**UNSHAKABLE**" and it's at the BACK TABLE / By the DOORS...
all you need to do is DROP your COMPLETED Connection Card
in the OFFERING PLATE / BASKET
- INTERHOPE: I also want to again call your attention to the **brochure for Interhope**....
The 12 Months of Christmas.... Our opportunities to help with sustainable solutions for
these precious kids and the work being done in orphanages in Burma, Cambodia and India.
I'm giving another sewing machine today... sewing/quilting is a passion with me, so I want
the orphanages to have the opportunity for sewing in their lives also... I invite you to look
over the brochure too and choose what you would like to help fund soon.... The sewing
machines really caught my eye this year!
- Remember, all donations turned in to BMZ by December 29th will be fully MATCHED!!
- So, please make your decisions timely.... It's another way of caring for our neighbor....
Those we see along our way even if mostly thanks to technology!

As our ushers GET READY to come forward

- I just want to remind you that ... STEWARDSHIP is DISCIPLESHIP ... we RECEIVE an
OFFERING EVERY Sunday BECAUSE it's BIBLICAL ... AND, it HELPS us GROW in our
FAITH!
- STEWARDSHIP VERSE ... **Philippians 4:6 = ⁶Don't worry about anything; instead, pray
about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.⁷**
- FIRST of our EARNINGS go back to the ONE who Blessed us in the 1st place! That's why
we are also able to do Automated Giving! You get paid ... the TITHE comes OUT FIRST!
Real easy, isn't it? You don't see it, you don't spend it!!
- God's plan for BUILDING His Church was through TITHING and GIVING of the
FOLLOWERS ... Share the GOOD NEWS! To REFRESH OTHERS!

*Special thanks to Andy Stanley, Nelson Searcy, R.A. Pegram and Stan Pegram
and ideas for this message.*

for outlines