

THE ART OF NEIGHBORING

Daily Devotional



CENTRAL CITY CHURCH

MONDAY: "I WANT TO BE YOUR NEIGHBOR!"

Mark 12:30-31

I grew up in the snow belt and loved to play in the snow. So for my birthday years ago, I received a snow blower. One morning, I woke early to find it had snowed a good 4 inches and was still snowing. Time to play!

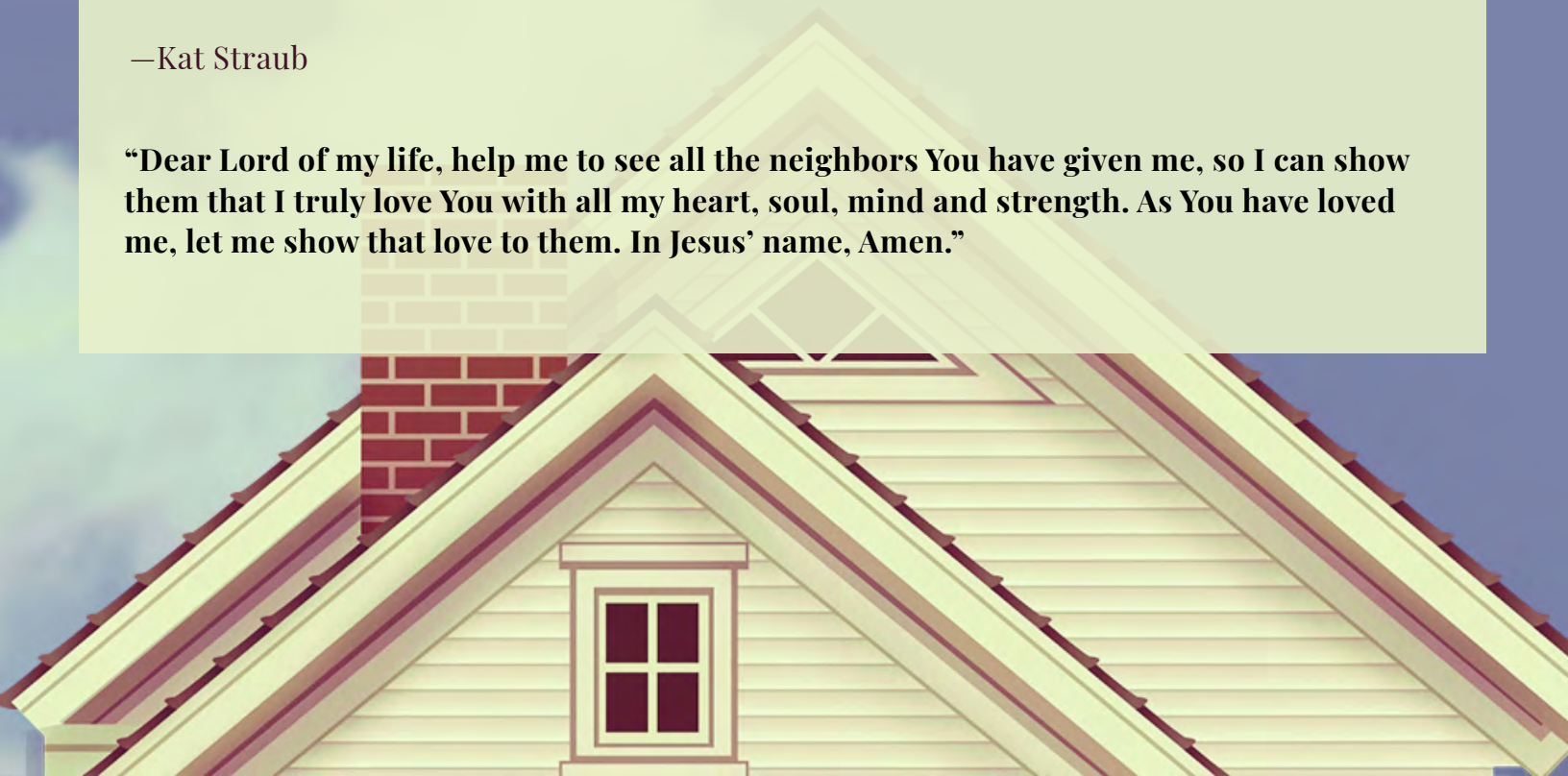
Since retiring and moving to our neighborhood, no one knew about my love for snow. I started my snow blower and went out helping each neighbor as I saw them shoveling their driveways. The 85-year-old couple, the nurse trying to get to the hospital, the Muslim businessman, the construction workers, college professors (one Taoist), the neighbor who was going through chemo, and neighbors further down the block welcomed me as I went driveway to driveway down the street.

Many thanked me and/or wanted to pay me but my reply was always the same, "God has blessed me so much. Now I get to bless you. Please give it to your place of worship when you go. If you don't have a church, I can recommend my church." I used this scripture to explain why I was willing to help to the Muslim family and some neighbor boys. The last time I got to play, when I stopped to rest, I heard from across the street, "I want to be your neighbor!" from our mail lady.

Who is your neighbor? Just the people living next to you? Just the same faith? Do you stop to help when God calls you? Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, or just when it is convenient?

—Kat Straub

"Dear Lord of my life, help me to see all the neighbors You have given me, so I can show them that I truly love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. As You have loved me, let me show that love to them. In Jesus' name, Amen."



TUESDAY: SACRIFICING FOR OTHERS

Leviticus 9:18

Have you ever noticed that not all people get along? How about Republicans and Democrats? Palestinians and Israelites? North and South Koreans? How about people in your church, or even in your own family?

I think this is especially true for people you are close to, like people in your church. This was a big learning experience for me when I graduated from seminary and became a pastor. I figured, quite naively, that everyone in the church loved Jesus, so they would also love one another. There would be no conflict—only peace, harmony and love. Boy was I ever wrong!

I found out that some churches are more loving than others. In every church I pastored, though, there were times when some parishioners were difficult to get along with. Sometimes it was just a disagreement about how to spend money or worship styles, sometimes it was even more trivial than that. But sometimes, the conflict could become downright mean and ugly.

I learned, the hard way, that when there is a need for peace between people, someone has to make the sacrifice. That doesn't mean that you give in, roll over, and allow others to use and abuse you. It does mean that you be the first to strive toward peace by accepting the other person, listening to their concerns and trying to reach a compromise.

And that starts at the altar. Not by pouring blood on it, as Aaron did, but by pouring your hurts, fears, frustrations and anger out to the Lord, so he can take them and bring healing to your heart and soul. Only then are you prepared to make peace with a brother or sister.

That is the kind of peace offering God wants from us now; not the blood of a bull, but the heart of the bull-headed. Try placing that on the altar the next time you need a peace offering, and see if that doesn't make a difference.

—Brian Straub

“Heavenly Father, too often we have been bull-headed, and wanted to ram our own way through other people. But that brings nothing but bloodshed. Help us instead to sacrifice ourselves upon your altar, so you may remake us into your image of love and acceptance, so we may make a peace offering with others we have difficulty with. Amen.”

WEDNESDAY: NEIGHBORS WHO ARE HUMBLE

Philippians 2:1-5

When I first think of neighbors, I remember my time in dorm rooms and apartments in college. Everyone lived so close to each other and you could walk up to any of your friend's rooms, knock on the door, and be welcomed. Wouldn't it be nice if all neighbors were that way?

When my husband and I moved to Columbus last July, we were intentional about getting to know our neighbors. We didn't have many neighbors near our old home and wanted to start on the right foot. So, like the crafty girl I am, I found a cute Pinterest card to attach to a bag of popcorn and we spent one afternoon walking around to all our neighbors delivering our popcorn. It was an eye-opening experience because we talked to the neighbors who were home, and we continue to talk each time we see them. But the neighbors we did not talk to, just leaving our popcorn note in their mailbox, we haven't talked to at all in the 9 months we have lived in this house.

I encourage you to read verses 3 and 4 again. These words speak to me. They remind me that sometimes it is better to do things for others, just because! Sometimes it is best to take part of that cake you made over to a neighbor's house after you know they had surgery. It is acceptable and humbling to take something homemade or thoughtful to a neighbor, whether you know them well or not. I always find that doing these things for our neighbors humbles me in ways that other activities such as Bible studies or spending time with friends cannot give.

My favorite part of this chapter is in the next passage, verses 6-11. I encourage you to read these verses as a reminder of how humble Jesus was. He did not seek equality with God to be an advantage over others. How can we today, in a culture so divided by race, politics, and religion, be humble like Jesus to show God's love to others in tangible ways?

—*Lauren Burns*

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Guide me to show humble acts of love and grace in any situation I see today. May I be an instrument of your peace and humble love in this world full of injustice.”

THURSDAY: OVERFLOWING LOVE

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Years ago, my younger brother Ben was in a really bad accident. He was flown on a life flight to a hospital and after doctors saved his life, he was eventually able to come home. My parents were a wreck. My dad blamed himself and my mom was beside herself seeing her youngest broken and in pain. Our neighbors became our life support. From prayer chains shared with their churches, to warm meals brought to our house, their immediate support and care penetrated the fear and feelings of helplessness. Over the weeks, they brought funny stories, sorbet and movies to distract Ben. They brought prayers and supportive friendship for my parents. The neighborhood kids would sit on his bed and make him laugh the way only kids can, while their moms had a cup of tea with my mom in the other room. Sometimes, the best solution to any problem is to simply be present and offer your love. Their love for my family overflowed and poured into our home, covering us and my brother with warmth and hugs (and teddy bears and balloons—lots of balloons.) My parents and I were so appreciative of the love, comfort, and care that our neighbors blanketed us with in that time. It was overwhelming.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul has that kind of deep love and care for the people of Thessalonica and his prayer for them is that they will know that kind of love and have it for each other. "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you." I like the way The Message version says it: "And may the Master Jesus pour on the love so it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around you." Can you imagine living in an apartment building, a street, an entire neighborhood or city that had love overflowing and spilling out from its people? Love that was splashing onto neighbors and everyone they came into contact with? What if we lived a life of that kind of love. What if we were so connected with Jesus and so filled with His love, that it came pouring out of us like we were a cup brimming over and splashed out onto our neighbors.

What is an easy act of love you can do to show love to those living near you? Paul tells us to love each other and everyone else, are there times when one group is harder (or easier) than the other?

—*Claire Schomaker*

“Lord, I want to be more like You. Create in me a new spirit of love, compassion and kindness for the people I know and those I don't know. It's easy to love my friends, but You tell us to also love our enemies. I echo the prayer of Paul and ask that you increase and overflow my love for those I know and for everyone else. Amen.”

FRIDAY: BUILD THEM UP

Romans 15:1-7

When I was in elementary school, my family lived in the corner lot of a half circle shaped cul-de-sac. Every Christmas, my sisters and I would bake sugar cookies using a variety of cookie cutters, decorating them with frosting and sprinkles. We'd make enough cookies to fill a couple dozen plates and wrap them all up before going door to door singing "We wish you a merry Christmas" to our neighbors. Since we could never get out of singing (mom's rule), we'd try to recruit our friends to join us so we would find it less boring.

As kids, we enjoyed the houses where nobody answered the door and we got to just leave the cookies of their doorstep. If you were to ask my mother, she'd say it was the neighbors who were home, the ones we got to sing to and hand cookies to in person—that's what it was all about. She wanted to greet friends we already knew, and yet also introduce ourselves to those we didn't know, to let them know that we're here.

Verse 2 says "let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up." I am reminded that God simply asks us to put our neighbor first. Maybe for you this is a neighbor who lives next door to you, someone you pass by periodically in your apartment building, or someone you run into at your local grocery store on numerous occasions.

What's one thing you can do today to please your neighbor?

—*Joanna Hildebrand*

"Lord, thank you for giving us neighbors. Please help me to see opportunities to meet, encourage, and love my neighbors. Remind me to accept them just as you have accepted me."

