

Love Your Neighbor



a 14 Day Guide



Sandra Peoples

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Introduction



From my favorite chair in our living room, I can see everything happening on our street. What I've noticed lately is our very busy neighbor, Shelia. She walks around the block every morning with another neighbor and waves at every car that drives by. One morning, Shelia stopped to help one neighbor clean all the way to the top of her windows. We have one couple on our street who spend six months of the year in Florida, and Shelia and her family take care of their house while they're gone. I've even seen Shelia deliver eggs from their chickens to families on our block.

One weekend, Shelia really went above and beyond what I've ever seen her do before. It was in October and the weather men were warning us hurricane Sandy was coming. Shelia rang our doorbell with her husband and sons, "Are you guys okay for the storm? How are your gutters? We've noticed your driveway floods when we get lots of rain. Can we help you dig a trench so the water flows out better?" And for the next couple hours, they worked around our house—on our roof, in our driveway, and in the yard. They brought their ladder, wheelbarrow, and leaf blower.

I want to be like Shelia. I want to know my neighbors' names. I want to help them. I want to bless them.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us one of the Pharisees asked Jesus a question in order to trick Him:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets,'" (22:34-40).

If you had asked me months ago how I loved my neighbors, I could tell you a whole list of ways. I love my neighbor by serving my church. I love my neighbor by writing my tithe check. I love my neighbor by praying for my friends who are missionaries. I love my neighbor by sponsoring a child in another country. And while it is true God calls and gifts us to love our neighbors all over the world, I just can't ignore that the verse may be telling me to love my actual neighbors.

Honestly, it's easier to love my neighbors across the world than my neighbors across the street.

But I want that to change. I'm taking fourteen days to intentionally love my neighbors. I want to learn their names, build relationships with them, and set a foundation that will last for the years we hope to live here. And I'm inviting you to join me.

Day 1 Make Room



You may remember the old saying, to get a friend you have to be a friend. It applies to your neighborhood too. To have friendships with your neighbors, you need to be a friend. There are a few reasons you aren't close to your neighbors. On the first day of our fourteen days to love your neighbor, I want you to think about the relationships you want to have with your neighbors, and identify reasons you don't already have those relationships. Here are a few that come to my mind:

1. We're just so busy.
2. I already have important relationships in my life and don't have room for more.
3. They aren't the type of people I want to be friends with (or have my kids be friends with).

To love your neighbors, you have to make room for them.

We're in the process of adopting a son. Because we want him in our lives, we've had to make room for him. We've cleared our schedule to be available when the time comes to travel to meet him. We've cleaned out old toys and clothes to make room for his bed, his toys, and his clothes. He is important to us, so we're getting rid of clutter that used to be important because he is more important.

If the reason you aren't friends with your neighbors is because you're just too busy, maybe you need to get rid of some clutter in your life. Identify one or two activities that take you away from home you could eliminate or adjust to make time to invest in your neighbors.

If you already have a full social life, you may need to think about the value of having friendships with people who live the closest to you.

If you're afraid of the negative influence some neighbors may have on your family, you need to pray about this situation. Jesus was a friend to sinners and set an example for us in this area. You may need to have conversations with your kids about how you have different standards for behavior (or language, or entertainment, or whatever) than your neighbors, but you're still called to love them and as a family you will be obedient to that call.

God knows your heart and your struggles. He gave the command to love your neighbors knowing it wouldn't be easy for every family on every block. But He will equip you to do what He calls you to do. Be open and receptive, and He will make a way. "The journey begins when

we choose a lifestyle of conversation and community over a lifestyle of busyness and accumulation," (*The Art of Neighboring* by Pathak & Runyon, 11).

Day 2 Start Fresh



Almost a year ago, an ambulance pulled up to one of the houses across the street. It was early in the morning when I was outside waiting for my son's van to take him to school. As the ambulance drove away I called to tell Lee so we could follow up. Well, actually I told him so he could follow up. And he did. We found out the man who was taken to the hospital had an infection they couldn't diagnosis for months. It continued to attack his body to the point they sedated him. Each day I would watch the wife leave to visit him in the hospital. Friends came over to mow their yard and rake their leaves. Lee went over a few times to see if there was anything he could do.

But, I'm embarrassed to say, I never went over to check on the wife myself. When I thought about doing it, I always had a good-ish excuse not to. I can't leave my young boys home alone, even to run across the street. I can't take them over because our younger son (who has autism) doesn't stay in one place long enough for me to have a long conversation.

Of course, I should have gone. I should have taken food. I should have gotten her a gift card to buy gas, or one for a restaurant close to the hospital. There are dozens of things I should have done, words I should have said.

He's home now. In a wheel chair. Nurses and therapists come each day with their equipment, in and out of the house.

Now I have another opportunity to do what I should do, to go over and offer encouragement or food. But my inaction from the past months embarrasses me. I don't know how to apologize for what I should have done and didn't do.

You may have had a similar experience. You didn't do what you should have done and now you don't know what to do. You're embarrassed. Today, let's not focus on what we didn't do. Let's focus on what we can do now.

If a situation requires an apology, be humble enough to offer it. If the situation needs a fresh start, make it happen. Don't let past mistakes keep you from doing what's right today. A year from now you don't want to regret another year of inaction.

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law," (Romans 13:10).

Day 3
Take a Walk



When I was in high school, my youth group did World Changers mission trips. We would load up in the church van and take off across the country. When we got to the job site, we were put in teams with kids from other youth groups and we would spend the week on construction projects like painting and roofing. We would also share the gospel with the homeowners and any neighbors who stopped to check out what we were doing. These trips were some of the highlights of my summers.

I didn't really think about it at the time, but the locations for the World Changers trips were planned months in advance. All the details were worked out ahead of time so we could focus on meeting the needs of the community. One of ways they prepared was by prayer walking the areas we would visit. As they walked, they prayed for the families in each home in the neighborhoods where we would work.

Today, take that same mind-set. Walk around your neighborhood and pray for each family in each home. What do you know about the families God has placed you right in the middle of? What more can you learn by paying attention while you walk?

Pray for God's heart for these people as you walk. Don't think, "What a mess this yard is!" Pray for the family who lives there and the situations in their lives that keep them from mowing their yard. Be sensitive and caring. Think about how God could use you to bless the families living in each house you pass.

"We can begin by noticing that we have neighbors, people who at the moment are nameless and faceless," (*The Art of Neighboring* by Pathak & Runyon, 34).

Day 4
Wave to Everyone



I went to college in Abilene, Texas. On the back roads around Abilene, everyone waved to everyone. We live in Pennsylvania now, and I don't see many people waving to each other. So one day, I decided to start waving. I wave when people walk by our house and we're out front. I wave to the other cars when driving down our street. It feels good to wave again.

The simple act of waving could be the start to our neighborhood being more open and friendly with each other. Don't underestimate what a wave and a smile could bring to someone's day. Start this simple habit today.

"Jesus says being a good neighbor is exactly the kind of life that can change the world," (*The Art of Neighboring* by Pathak & Runyon, 87).

Day 5
Clean Up Your Space



Most of the houses on our street were built in the 1960s. About half of these houses are still occupied by the original owners. These couples are now retired. Most of the husbands spend their days outside mowing yards, trimming bushes, tending gardens, or washing cars. We do not spend our days mowing, trimming, tending, or washing. My husband is a pastor and works different hours each day of the week, depending on what meetings he has and what visits he needs to make. When he is home, we want to spend time together more than we want to do yard work.

But, our back yard is lined with forsythia bushes. They grow in every direction and need to be trimmed often. They are kind of a pain, but we imagine they are even more of a pain for our neighbors who can't just trim our bushes whenever they want to. We try (emphasis on *try!*) to keep them trimmed so they don't cause any issues between us and our neighbors. (One year, maybe I'll just rip them all up and save us all some headaches!)

The point is, we need to be sensitive to the space with share with others. Being the neighbor with the loud dog, or the one who always lets the leaves blow into someone else's yard, or the ones with a car that doesn't run abandoned in the front yard is not the best way to encourage strong relationships with your neighbors.

If you live in an apartment or townhome, you can also clean up your space and be sensitive to your neighbors in other ways. Park in the appropriate parking space. When you have people over, tell them where to park so they don't accidentally take a neighbor's spot. Keep music and noise at an appropriate level. When it snows, shovel your part of the sidewalk as soon as you can. Shovel more than your part if you're able!

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves," (Philippians 2:3).

Day 6
Hang Out in the Front Yard



When the weather is nice, we take family walks after dinner, waving to everyone we see. When we get home, we let the boys play in the front yard until it gets dark. We'll get the soccer ball out or shoot hoops in the driveway. We continue to wave to anyone who drives by and talk to neighbors who are getting home from work or checking their mailboxes. When we lived in a townhome, we put the boys' little sandbox out front. We didn't even mind when we came home and found the neighbor's kids in it!

We haven't had huge breakthroughs just by hanging out in the front yard, but we hope to communicate we're present and available.

Pathak and Runyon write, "We all have a need for genuine community, and nothing beats the frequency, availability, and spontaneity of connecting deeply with others who live nearby," (*The Art of Neighboring*, 10). We're still on the path to connecting deeply, but if we communicate we are available just by being visible, we pray the connections will come.

Day 7
Meet a Need



Ok, by now, you've taken some walks. You've waved to a few neighbors. You may have had some conversations in your front yard. Today, take time to pray about what God has been showing you in your neighborhood. Have you noticed a neighbor who has a need you can meet?

Approach your neighbor out of love and communicate grace, not judgment. Our neighbor Shelia was great about this when she and her family came over before the hurricane and simply asked if we needed help getting prepared. Inspired by their concern, I went to the house next door to ours and made sure the young couple who just moved in knew we'd be around if they needed anything and gave them our phone number.

Could you rake leaves? Shovel snow? Offer a bottle of cold water to a neighbor mowing his lawn? Meet a need today and pray for God to show you even more opportunities to serve your neighbors.

"One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor," (Proverbs 12:26).

Day 8
Ask for Help



Of all the ways to get to know our neighbors, my family is probably best at this one. As one of the youngest couples on the block and living far away from our families, we need tools, advice, and sometimes even manpower. We know which neighbor to visit when we need a twelve-foot ladder, which one to call when we need a cup of sugar, and who might know why our lawnmower won't start.

The neighbor with the greenest lawn would probably love to tell you what fertilizer to try. The one who runs by your house every morning could answer questions you have about a new pair of running shoes. The guy with the classic car likely knows the best mechanic in town.

Don't be shy about asking questions. People love to share what they know!

"Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future," (Proverbs 19:20).

Day 9
Throw Out Your Agenda



It's no accident you live on your block (or in your apartment or other type of home). Acts 17:26-27 tells us, "And [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet his is actually not far from each one of us."

God knows where you live and who your neighbors are. He put you there for a reason. Scripture is clear on that reason. It is to love your neighbor.

Before you go deeper in this project to love your neighbor, you may need to examine your motives.

Pathak and Runyon remind us, "We don't love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted," (*The Art of Neighboring* 102).

Now, it is true we are called to make disciples. And it is true God may use you to draw your neighbors closer to Him because you are obedient to the command to love them. But your primary motivation is love, not conversion.

Take time to pray about your heart and your motivation. Surrender to God's plan for how He will use you to love your neighbors. Thank Him for placing you right where you are and for giving you a purpose for being there.

Day 10
Invite a Family Over



Up to this point, you've mostly stayed on neutral territory—driveways, front yards, parking lots, and hallways. Now's the time to take a big step and invite someone into your home!

You can start with the family you've gotten to know best as you've offered help, or the family who has helped you most. Make it casual and fun. Just let them see you and your family as you really are.

This isn't an easy step for me to take. Our boys are young, and well, boys. They make messes, noises, and smells like typical boys. Inviting people into our home means we're inviting them into our messes (and noises, and possibly smells). But that's life, and if we're going to do life together, that will all be part of it.

When you're waving, smiling, and helping someone rake leaves, you can appear to have it all together. When you burn the rolls and kick dirty socks under the couch, your neighbors will not only know you aren't perfect, they will know they don't have to be either. Your imperfection can actually be a gift.

So open your home, share a meal, and linger as long as you can asking questions and sharing stories.

"The practice of neighboring creates incredible opportunities for us as believers to connect our story to the stories of our neighbors and to God's story," (*The Art of Neighboring* by Pathak & Runyon, 10).

Day 11
Start a Club



When we lived in a block of townhomes, one of our neighbors invited me to join her and some friends for their book club. I love reading so of course I said yes! That year I read ten books I wouldn't have picked myself, and got to know my neighbors and make even more friends. We had many conversations about having faith and living it out. It wasn't forced, just natural and easy. In that group, I wasn't "the pastor's wife," I was just someone who wanted to talk about books, enjoy the snacks, and laugh with these friends.

Think about what you do during the day. Do you have preschoolers at home? You could start a play group. Do you enjoy sewing? Maybe some ladies on your block would enjoy sewing with you. If something is interesting to you, chances are, someone else is interested in it too.

Remember, God placed you exactly where you are and gave you specific gifts. I believe it was for the purpose of using those gifts where He placed you. Use your interests and talents to guide you in starting a group that would be fun for you and your neighbors.

"Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up," (Romans 15:2).

Day 12
Celebrate Together



In Luke 15, when a man found his lost sheep and a woman found her lost coin, they celebrated with their neighbors:

“And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost,’” (Luke 15:6).

“And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost,’” (Luke 15:9).

We can join with our neighbors when we have reasons to celebrate too. They can be holiday celebrations, family celebrations (like graduations or weddings), or even sports celebrations like a Super Bowl party or your favorite college team making the tournament.

You also notice in these accounts the man and woman celebrated with friends and neighbors. You don’t have to keep those two spheres separate! When you’re having friends over, invite some neighbors over also. Next time my Sunday night Bible study meets at my house, I plan to invite a neighbor over too.

Have fun with your neighbors!

Day 13
Plan a Block Party



Now it's time to pull out all the stops, so to speak. When learning to love your neighbors, you not only want to connect with them, but encourage them to connect with each other. The entire neighborhood, apartment complex, or row of townhomes could be transformed when neighbors become friends.

Take advantage of the friendships you have made and recruit help for your party. Plan the date and time (Sunday afternoons are often best for people), location, menu, and entertainment. Invite everyone in your area by going door-to-door with flyers. Make it as accessible and enjoyable for people as possible.

The book I've often referenced has lots of help for planning a block party. If you visit the book's website, artofneighboring.com, you can even download their [block party kit](#). You could search the Internet (or even Pinterest!) for more ideas on successful block parties. We're going to take this step in the spring when we all thaw out around here!

Day 14
Keep Loving



When I was discussing this book with my ladies' Sunday school class, my co-teacher told a story from her life that encouraged me. Ann waits with her grandchildren for the bus each morning and has gotten to know some of her neighbors better as they chat at the bus stop. She and one neighbor in particular have hit it off. What's interesting is they've actually been neighbors for years and never built a relationship. In fact, one morning Ann's neighbor told her, "I wish we hadn't waited thirty years to become friends!"

Galatians 5:14 says, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" When we take this command literally and seriously, we will continue to find ways to love our neighbors. We will make room for them in our lives, serve them, celebrate with them, and even help them connect with each other.

Don't give up on your neighbors. Keep loving them. "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up," (Galatians 6:9).

About Sandra Peoples



Sandra and her family are trying to bring the best of the southern hospitality they grew up with to their northern neighborhood. Living hours away from friends and over twenty minutes away from their church, they have learned to build relationships with those closest to them. Their on-going ministry to their neighbors was the catalyst for this book. They are still learning to follow the greatest commandments and remember their neighbors' names.

You can connect with Sandra at her website, [Impact](#), where she writes to encourage you to use your gifts and passions to make a difference in your family, church, community, and the world.



