

The Neighborhood: Gospel Neighboring

Matthew 5:13-16

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Steve DeWitt

How many of you grew up in a neighborhood? I grew up in Iowa and people assume that I grew up on a farm because after all, that's all there is in Iowa. Actually, I had a neighborhood. On the one side were the Wessels. They became dear friends. If we were low on flour, we could ask them for it. If they needed someone to mow the yard while they were gone, they could ask us. On the other side were the Hermans. Their daughter babysat us growing up and we played football and shot fireworks in their front lawn. Across the street was a family that nobody really liked. They built a fence around their house indicating the feelings were mutual. I could tell you more, but I'll bet your neighborhood growing up was to some degree like mine. Some good neighbors, some not-so-good neighbors, some really bad neighbors.

What influence would a vibrant Christian family in a neighborhood look like? How does an authentic Christian influence the "neighbors" of his life? And here is the grander question for this teaching series: what influence should a vibrant church have in its neighborhood, community and even the world? Bethel Church wants to be a great neighbor! But who is our neighbor?

Jesus was asked the same question: If I am to love my neighbor as myself, then who is my neighbor? Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan whose point is that the question is not, who is my neighbor I should love, but to whom can I be a loving neighbor?

This Blueprints series is trying to lay out God's design for a vibrant church so that we can be that vibrant, biblical church. For the church to fulfill this, these qualities must be evident in our lives: Living Room – life of worship; Family Room – Fellowship; Kitchen – feeding on God's Word; Garden – serving others; today, the neighborhood. Jesus addresses the question of the church's influence in its neighborhood in Matthew 5.

The Church in the World (Matthew 5:13-16)

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16)

Jesus was the master illustrator. He could take profound truth and put it in terms that the average Joes like us could understand. What's more common than salt and light? You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world. What do salt and light have in common? Both affect and influence. Wherever salt goes, it has an effect. Wherever light goes, it has an influence.

Salt of the earth

In the ancient world, salt has two primary functions. The first was a preservative. Salt was rubbed into meat to slow down decay. To this day, if you go to the Middle East, they have

open air markets with meat hanging everywhere. It's not for the faint of heart. Preserving food was very important in a society that didn't have freezers and refrigerators.

Salt was also used the same way we use it. If someone says, "Pass the salt," do you think, "Oh, he wants to preserve his food"? No. He wants to add flavor. Salt gives flavor. Even adding a little salt to watermelon brings out the flavor.

Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth. The "we" here is Christians. It's important to make that point as he is not just talking about good, moral people. He is speaking to people who have reward in heaven—Christians (verse 12); true authentic followers of Jesus.

He goes on to ask the question, if salt loses its saltiness, what good is it? If salt no longer has the effect it is supposed to, what value does it have? It has none. Salt that isn't salty is useless salt.

Light of the world

This verse is the inspiration for the well-known children's song, "*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine! Hide it under a bushel? No!*" and on the song goes. Our kids get into the song; do we?

What Jesus is aiming at is that Christians living as Christians are like a city on a hill. Cities put off light. I was recently in Chicago at night in one of its tall buildings. It is awe-inspiring to see the lights of the city; it can be seen from miles away. That's truer for a city on a hill. It can be seen by everybody around it. The purpose of light at night is to help you see. That's why nobody puts a bowl over a light at night; it defeats the purpose. "*Hide it under a bushel? No!*" Our kids get it.

Jesus concludes with "*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" (Verse 16) Our light then is the good deeds that we do that are the byproduct of our faith in God. Our light is not our buildings or our name. It is the moral and spiritual light put off by the testimony of our lives lived out in the spiritual darkness of this world. This doesn't mean we are perfect. Far from it. Rather, it means the hope of forgiveness in Christ and his redemption shines over the reality of sin and despair. It's what we've seen today in baptism—the testimony of changed lives and a real hope in this life and eternal life in the next. The verse concludes by suggesting that men see these good deeds and it actually leads them to faith. They praise our Father in heaven.

Salt and light – They both have an effect wherever they are. They are transformational. Jesus is describing the influence the church is to have in the world.

Illustration of the salt shaker – Here we are inside the church (inside the salt shaker). We love each other, support each other, encourage each other, and serve alongside each other. Inside the salt shaker, it's really salty. If you like salt, there's no better place than in the salt shaker. As more and more people come, we've been filling the salt shaker with more and more salt in here.

As long as the salt is still in the salt shaker, what good is it? What happens to salt that stays in the salt shaker a long time? It gets crusty. We enjoy being cozy with other grains of salt. We enjoy the safety of being in the salt shaker. We can talk and study and read books about the adventures other salt had when they dared to get out of the salt shaker, but as

long as we're comfy in the salt shaker, we're having no influence on the culture and the community around us and we're not fulfilling our purpose.

The church makes the salt salty and then shakes our salt out into a community that desperately needs the transformation the power of the gospel brings. Have you ever listened carefully as you have shaken salt? Try it at lunch. If you listen very carefully as you shake, you will hear screams like, "I don't want to go...! I like it in here...!" "No...!" When you hear that, just say, "Good for nothing salt!" That's what Jesus calls it. You see the point? For salt to have influence and for light to have effect, both have to be let out. For the church to have its effect, Christians cannot be bottled up in themselves or in the church, but must be in the community and in the world.

Woodrow Wilson, the 28th president of the United States, told the story of being in a barbershop one time: *"I was sitting in a barber chair when I became aware that a powerful personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself to have his hair cut and sat in the chair next to me. Every word the man uttered, though it was not in the least didactic, showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him. And before I got through with what was being done to me I was aware I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. D.L. Moody was in that chair. I purposely lingered in the room after he had left and noted the singular affect that his visit had brought upon the barber shop. They talked in undertones. They did not know his name, but they knew something had elevated their thoughts, and I felt that I left that place as I should have left a place of worship.* (John MacArthur, *Matthew*, p. 236)

Friends, that's influence. That's salt. That's light. Lest you be discouraged as any comparison to D.L. Moody produces, what Jesus is sharing here is achievable for all of us.

Bethel Church Does Gospel Neighboring

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Every word here is important.

You – each of the eleven standing there. Peter couldn't delegate it to John. Andrew couldn't say it wasn't his gift. Thomas couldn't offer to pay someone else to do it for him. *Each of you* will do this.

Will – the future tense here includes an imperative. Like your momma saying, "You will go up to your room and you will do it with a good attitude." The "will" doesn't imply options for the child. The "will" is a command. You *will* be my witnesses.

Be my witnesses – What is a witness? When the judge calls a witness to the stand, this means that they will be expressing something that they have seen or know to be true.

- *"One of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."* (Acts 1:22)
- *"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."* (Acts 2:32)
- *"You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."* (Acts 3:15; also 5:32, 10:39,41)

Jerusalem...Judea and Samaria...end of the earth - Notice the scope of the mission. Luke actually uses this verse as an outline for the book. To Jerusalem: chapters 2-7. To Judea and Samaria: Acts 8. End of the earth: chapters 9-28.

Why not just Jerusalem and not the end of the earth? Why not just the end of the earth and not Jerusalem? Because the mission is both/and. It is here and there. It is our Jerusalem and our Samaria and furthest reach possible in our world.

This has become our mission mantra—*Around the corner and around the world*. It's not one or the other, but both. The whole idea of missionaries being those who leave here to go there can be terribly misleading because all of us are to be witnesses for Christ. We are either missionaries in Jerusalem, or missionaries in Judea and Samaria or missionaries to wherever in the world. We're all witnesses; we just do it in different places.

How does Bethel do this? Our strategy is essentially the same. Our Jerusalem, our Judea and Samaria, our uttermost parts. Let me explain by following that outline.

My "Jerusalem"

Jerusalem was a big city in its day, far bigger than one person could evangelize. Our city is the same. Too big. Too diverse. But each of us has a personal Jerusalem. It's where I live. Where I work. Where I go to school. My family. My friends or acquaintances. The Great Commission for me begins in my Jerusalem and me being a witness there.

The motive in this has to be loving God and expressing it in loving people; actually caring for them as individuals, including their spiritual needs and destiny, but not simply that. Our motive has to be loving them for the sake of loving them NOT with the ulterior motive of evangelizing them.

"Sharing the story of Jesus and his impact on our lives is the right motive, but it cannot be an ulterior motive in developing relationships. We don't love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted." (Runyon and Pathak)

This allows us to be normal, loving people caring for normal people—not Christian versions of the stereotypical used car salesman.

Do you have a heart for the unsaved around you? What are you doing about it? Would they have any idea you care for them?

I heard recently the question, "If Jesus suddenly appeared to you and said, 'I am going to answer every prayer you prayed last week,' how many people would suddenly be in the kingdom because of it?" I ask myself the same question. The potential of this is tremendous. If each of us had one person that we loved as a gospel neighbor and God used that loving to bring them to belief in Christ, think of the impact (see figure 1 below).



Figure 1 - A map of where all Bethel Attendees live

It seems to me that one thing we don't consider and is fairly non-threatening is to share with people about our church as a portal to spiritual discussion. I have heard stories of Bethelonians working side by side with other Bethelonians for quite awhile before they discover they go to the same church. How about inviting people to our upcoming Christmas Eve service and use our cultural celebration of Christmas to introduce them to Christianity? You can use it as a conversation starter about spiritual things. Or perhaps invite them to church on an appropriate weekend. There are many first steps, but that's one of them.

Our Judea/Samaria

This is Bethel's outreach into our broader region. We have many different initiatives, but the big ones are:

Mission Them

Our vision is to multiply disciples through multiple sites and multiple partnerships. We launched a 2nd campus this fall in Cedar Lake. It's going great with 467 people worshipping there last week. We're prayerful about doing another campus in fall of 2013 as the Lord allows. We just funded *The Women's Center's* new site in Gary and presented that money to them last week. We're in discussions about a number of things, so the future is bright here (see below for a list of organizations we support financially).

Organizations We Support Financially

- Baptist Children's Home
- Cedar Lake Ministries
- Moody Radio
- Twin Lakes Camp
- Women's Center of NWI

Group Community Service

Small groups are a big deal here and part of the function of small groups is mutual ministry. To help with this, the church provides \$400 per small group for the purpose of blessing the community. We have 80 small groups and those monies are used to meet practical needs. It has blessed the community and us. Our church partners on different levels with many local ministries to give them money and people to serve and love our community (see ministries we help below).

Bethel Community Ministries

- Bethel Career Resource Network
- Children in Crisis
- Colonial Nursing Home Outreach
- CREED (Caring Relationships that Embrace & Encourage People with Disabilities)
- Deaf Ministry
- English as a Second Language
- Harvest Market Food Pantry
- Host Family Program
- Refugee & Immigrant Ministry

Organizations We Partner with Through Volunteer Service

- The Arc
- The Ark Shelter
- Berean Fellowship
- The Boys and Girls Club of NWI
- Catholic Charities
- Chicagoland Christian Village
- Children's Hunger Fund
- Faith and Action
- The Family House
- Food Bank of NWI
- The City of Gary
- Good Samaritan Mission Ministries
- Nazareth Home
- The Neighborhood Organization (Penn Center)
- Old Community Firehouse
- Peace Baptist Church
- Rainbow Shelter
- The Red Cross
- The Revolution Church
- The Salvation Army
- Share the Rock
- Sojourner Truth House
- St. Jude's Home
- St. Monica's House
- Urban Faith Works

Salt and Light Initiative

Two years ago we completed our book: *Salt and Light: A Guide to Loving Northwest Indiana*. We gave one to every household. God has used that book to draw other churches and ministries into conversations with us about loving Northwest Indiana.

In fact, we are hosting a one-day conference on December 1 called *the Salt and Light Conference*. We would love for you to attend to learn more about reaching our Jerusalem and Judea.

End of the earth

This is our world missions effort (see our missionaries below).

Bethel Church Missionaries

Africa

- Bangura, Bosco & Susan—TECT in Sierra Leone
- Downey, Bob & Sheila—Wheels for the World in Ghana
- Rouster, John & Lorella—Every Child Ministries in Africa
- The Evangelical College of Theology (TECT) in Sierra Leone

Asia

- Anderson, Gene & Shelly—Kids Alive in Taiwan
- Hudson, Betty—Christian Music Association in Japan
- Missionary in an Undisclosed Location
- Regier, Don & Martha—TEAM in Japan
- Stakes, Ty & Paula—HCJB Global in Asia
- Thomas, Abraham & Aleyamma—Global Compassion & Logos Bible College in India
- White, Ron—Tri-City Baptist Missions in Japan
- Widup, Bill & Christina—Bethel Church in Vanuatu

Europe & ME

- Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Lebanon
- Fasold, Jim & Carolyn—Greater Europe Mission in Spain
- Peterson, Roger & Susan—Biblical Ministries Worldwide in France
- Staabs, Scotte & Beth Ann—ABWE in the EU & ME
- Winget, Steve & Cheryl—ABWE in Hungary

North America

- Beach, Ross & Inky—TEAM (Retiring)
- Butler, Brent & Erin—CRU in IA
- Cedar Lake Ministries in IN
- Central American Theological Seminary (SETECA) in Guatemala
- Cisneros, Otilia—LIFE in Messiah in Canada
- DeMateo, Matt & Sarah—New Life Church in IL
- Ebersole, Russ and Nancy—ABWE in PA (Retired)
- Getz, Jim & Karen—Navigators at Michigan State University in MI
- Grey, Buc & Carmen—Young Life in IL
- Herzog, Dottie—SIL in Mexico
- Hill, Tom & Karen—Leadership Resources in IL
- Lackey, Al & Anita—Kids Alive in IN
- McMillan, David & Rebecca—Bible Witness Camp in IL
- Ozaki, Kazuo—HCJB Global in Arizona & Japan
- Page, Dick & Kathy—Soar International in AK
- Page, Dub—Soar International in WA
- Phares, Don & Sherie—CEF in IN
- Plumlee, Kyle & Jenn—Campus Outreach in MO
- Taber, Wes & Lori—LIFE in Messiah in IL
- Wilson, Ron & Jen—North America Indigenous Ministries in Canada

South America

- Frey, Allan & Diane—Baptist Mid-Missions in Peru

I call it world missions because in a sense, everything we do is missions even here and even this message. All of it is fulfilling the Great Commission. We partner with missionaries, schools, and agencies. The list is a bit longer now due to our church merger this summer. We took on their missionaries, so we have some new friends to get to know. We are trying to share about them by featuring a missionary of the month which you will see during upcoming services.

We also have a few short-term mission trips we are doing this summer. One to Sierra Leone, Africa. I think everyone should do at least one short-term mission trip and maybe this is your one. Visit our website (bethwelweb.org) for more information.

We want to follow God's blueprint to be a vibrant church of gospel neighboring. We have some great things going on and we are excited about the future. This truly depends on all of us being on mission with Jesus to be salt and light. Salt makes people thirsty (good works), and light helps them see (the gospel). Let's love neighbors in our Jerusalem, in our Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world.

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