

## Lesson 4: Moving from Stranger to Friend While Setting Healthy Boundaries

Lesson Summary: This teaching explores the practical and spiritual aspects of building authentic relationships with neighbors, moving from strangers to acquaintances to meaningful relationships. The session addresses both the joys and challenges of neighboring, emphasizing that while we are called to love our neighbors, we must also establish healthy boundaries. The teaching distinguishes between being "responsible to" versus "responsible for" our neighbors, encouraging genuine connection without creating dependency. Using the example of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, the message highlights the importance of both giving and receiving help, recognizing that God often chooses to work through human relationships rather than providing directly. The concept of finding a "person of peace"—someone hospitable and receptive—is introduced as a strategic way to build community connections that naturally multiply.

### Key Points:

- Neighboring involves a progression from stranger to acquaintance to relationship, requiring intentionality without manufactured scenarios
- We are called to be "responsible to" our neighbors (loving, encouraging, blessing, praying, serving reasonably) but not "responsible for" them (their outcomes, consequences, choices, or emotions)
- Receiving help from others is as important as giving help; refusing to receive robs others of the blessing of serving
- Not every neighbor will have the same capacity or desire for relationship, and that's acceptable
- Setting boundaries is sometimes necessary and doesn't negate the call to love neighbors
- Finding your "person of peace"—someone naturally hospitable and well-connected—can multiply effectiveness in building neighborhood community
- We are not the heroes or saviors of our neighborhoods; we are simply participants in community
- It's okay to focus intentional efforts on a smaller group rather than trying to reach everyone equally
- Genuine connection requires vulnerability and the willingness to let others see our needs

Scripture Reference:

- 1 Kings 17:7-16 (Elijah and the widow of Zarephath)
- Luke 10 (Jesus sending out the 72 disciples to find the "person of peace")
- Matthew 17:1-9 (The Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John)

Stories:

- The instructor's neighbor who is an elderly man who rides his horse to check fences, now appearing frail and needing connection beyond just "your cows are out" conversations
- A 103-year-old neighbor who receives an annual birthday parade, prompting a spontaneous visit with flowers that led to meaningful connection with her family
- Jenny Allen's friendship that fell apart because she never let her friend see her needs, making the friend feel unnecessary
- The instructor's friend who directly asked, "Do you want to be friends?" cutting through the awkwardness of relationship-building
- A neighbor who lost their house in a fire, learning to receive help when others brought practical items like underwear and paper products
- Amanda's experience (referenced but not present) of having to set boundaries with neighbors who were becoming too dependent
- A Halloween neighborhood gathering with a bounce house and hot dogs that created organic community connections without formal invitations
- The "traveling plate" story where a Thanksgiving plate must be filled with food and passed to someone else, creating a chain of generosity