

We are in our last week of meeting exclusively online and our last week in the series *Sent Home* where we've been exploring how God sends us into our neighborhoods to live out his mission of loving him and loving our neighbor. I've been thrilled with the stories I've heard about people meeting their neighbors, filling out their neighborhood map, praying. I received a text from a friend who said because of this series, her husband has been intentional about engaging his neighbors, met two young men in his alley, found out one had a little girl who just turned one, and went out, bought her a birthday card and a stuffed animal, and delivered it to them. What an awesome story and perfect example of what we have been discussing.

This man lived out the first two things we said are necessary to love our neighbor well, an open heart, both to the God who sends and the neighbors he sends us to, and open eyes and ears, because the more you know the better you can love. My prayer is that it leads to the third thing, which is an open door. This is the last of the three because it follows the other two and because it's the most challenging. Opening up the doors of our home exposes us and lets others into our sacred space. But that's the very reason why it is so impactful because, as we'll see this morning, **open doors open doors.**

We're going to attend a Matthew party. These were started a few decades ago, inspired by this morning's passage, where a believer or believers invite non-believers to a social gathering for the purpose of connection and possibility of talking about Jesus. When we open our doors like Matthew opened his, we open the door to relationship and redemption.

[Luke 5:27-32] 27 After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." 28 And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. 29 And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. 30 And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" 31 And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Levi's profession was the isolated and loathsome practice of a tax collector. He was viewed as a traitor to his people because he enriched himself at their expense. But one day he had an encounter with Jesus and all that changed. Levi responded immediately and left his old way of life. He wanted to celebrate it, share his newfound life with his friends, and introduce them to the person responsible for it. He didn't do it by inviting them to the synagogue, though. He did it by inviting them into his home. He threw a great feast and invited those around him into his most intimate space to build relationships and introduce them to Jesus.

Our homes are like no other place or space. Just think about the difference between meeting someone out for dinner or gathering in one of your homes. They just don't compare because the intimacy of our homes can't be replicated. The Pharisees' reaction affirms that. They wouldn't have cared if Jesus interacted with these tax collectors and sinners in the middle of town, but there is something different about this happening in a home over a shared meal. Those things communicate invitation, recognition, and comfort, and have the potential to lead to something the Bible calls fellowship. That glorious word *koinonia* that is more than a gathering of people but a sharing of lives. That is what is possible when we open our doors.

Some of you may have a check in your spirit because opening our doors makes us vulnerable and lets people see on the inside. But perfection is not required, nor is a great feast like Levi's. We are not called to impress, we're called to love, and our imperfections give others permission to be honest about their own. That's when walls come down and relationships can flourish. **That means an invitation into your most intimate, sacred, imperfect space is enough.**

And the more the door of relationship opens, the more the door of redemption opens, because **the safest place for someone to meet Jesus may be your home.** It's been said the gospel travels at the speed of relationship, and we see that truth in this passage. Levi invites his neighbors into his life to meet the one who eternally changed it. He is already living out God's mission to use his home and resources to bring good news of Jesus to his friends.

An open door communicates in the most explicit way all of what we've been talking about these three weeks: You are seen, you are accepted, you are welcome, I care about you. And if that's all it ever does for one of your neighbors, it's done a good thing because that's God sends us to do. But it's also through those relationships, built through open doors, where we get to share life and talk about Jesus.

Martha and I had dinner with some friends this last week and after she commented that I talked about God more than I ever have with them. It was true. But it wasn't strategic, it wasn't forced, it wasn't part of my covert evangelization plan. It was us sharing our lives with one another and in the course of doing that, He who is central in my life was bound to come up. I was totally at ease with it, and so were they, b/c it came out of our relationship with them. This is the opportunity we are talking about.

There's also the potential to impact the kids in your neighborhood. That's how I came to faith. I've got an open door to the kids in my neighborhood. There's often a pack of them running in and out all the time, and Martha and I are intentional about loving them. I just found out one of them who does not come from a believing home signed up to go to Pine Cove next summer with my youngest and wants to start going to church with us. Not because the secret plan worked, but because we show him the love of Christ when he's around, God has come up in conversations with Joe, and he's interested. Hallelujah! **Open doors open doors.**

But be ready because neighboring can get messy because we're all messy. Levi invited messy people over. They were outcasts. The vile "progressive" cancel culture isn't a new thing. It's thousands of years old. But **we get to replace cancel culture with redemption culture.** That kid? He broke my mailbox a few months back. That's alright. It's worth it. You have neighbors with real life problems and different beliefs than you, and God wants you to love them anyway. God wants you to love the neighbor with a Biden sign or Trump sign, a Blue Lives Matter and a Black Lives Matter sign, the guy who's always working on his car and revving the engine, the family who never cuts their grass, the person who never says hello. **You have been sent to show them the love of Jesus.** That's why the first week started with names and prayer because names humanize someone, and prayer allows God to help us see them as he sees them. When that happens, we will open our doors and let him go to work.

I want you to hear from several of your fellow church members about how they are doing this well, and then we'll come back for some final thoughts and offer this up to God

I want to again thank the panel, and I hope you were able to get some ideas and inspiration. Additionally, we have added some open doors ideas to our resource page on our website, some covid-specific, and one of our fall Training Experiences will be on neighboring, *The Easiest Way to Change the World*, led by Dana and Ben Hentschel.

In the mid-300's, the Roman Emperor Julian wanted to revive pagan religion and suppress Christianity, but he wasn't sure it was possible because of what he witnessed. He observed that Christianity "has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care of the burial of the dead...the [Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render them." So he came up with a revolutionary idea for his pagan priests. He told them to love their pagan gods and love their fellow man.

Loving our neighbor is the legacy of our faith. It has set us apart from the rest of the world since the day of Pentecost, shining light into this dark world and captivating its attention and curiosity. Christians loving God and loving their neighbor has literally changed the world. So, as we get ready to regather next week, let's not forget where you've been the last six months. **You are the church**, and God sent you where you are right now to change this world one neighbor at a time.