Small Group Time: How Do I Love My Neighbor?

**May 26th, 2021 @7:15-8 pm**

*Instructions*

*Be sure to start on a positive note. Welcome each learner by name. Let them know you're glad they're here! If anyone is absent, mention you'll be praying for that person together. Small Group Time is for give-and-take discussion. Your main job is to draw learners out and get them talking about the theme. Ask open-ended questions that will provoke responses. Once the conversation begins, intervene only to bring it back on track or to stimulate more talk.*

Discussion Time

*Use the following questions to kick off a conversation about the theme:*

1. How would your life change if you treated everyone as a neighbor? If everyone treated you as a neighbor?

2. Why is this “neighbor” stuff so important to God?

3. How easy is it to treat everyone as a neighbor? Why?

4. Have you ever been surprised when someone you thought was an enemy treated you as a neighbor? What was that like? *It can be disconcerting when people don’t behave as you expect them to. Adolescence can be a time when peers are cruel, but it can also be a time when people are surprisingly kind, and previous conceptions of peers start to change.*

5. How can God help when loving our neighbors is particularly difficult?

*God offers free forgiveness for all the ways we fall short, and through baptism God has given us a community of people who can help us when living out love for a neighbor is difficult. God is not offended by prayers of frustration and anger over our neighbors.*

6. How can you help your neighbor next door?

7. How can you help your neighbor across the world?

8. Why is it important to consider all people our neighbors?

9. Have you ever thought about the church’s neighbors before? Who are they?

10. What is the church’s responsibility as a neighbor? How are we living it out? What could we be doing better?

**Open the Bible**

1. Luke 10:29-37 is one of the most familiar of Jesus’ parables, the good Samaritan. Explore Jesus’ reason for telling it by having a volunteer read Luke 10:25-28. *Explain that the lawyer was an expert in religious law sent to test Jesus’ knowledge. Ask students to “test” your knowledge of the parable with their questions about it. You may try using Jesus’ method of answering a question with a question.*

-*Find a map of Israel in New Testament times and locate the cities of Jerusalem and Jericho. Explain that Jerusalem is at a higher elevation than Jericho, so when Jesus says the man traveled “down” the road, it is not just an expression.* Read the story together (Luke 10:29-37). *Then declare you are a detective investigating the robbery and that they are witnesses to the whole thing. With Bibles closed, by asking questions of individual students, reconstruct the crime and the various reactions of passersby. Make sure you probe deeply into the motivations of the three who encountered the crime scene.* *Jesus’ definition of neighbor outstripped the law’s definition. The law told you who your neighbor was; Jesus focused on who you were to be a neighbor to!*

2. Matthew 5:43-47 pushes Jesus’ definition of neighbor even more—to those who would do you harm. Read through the passage together.

a. How does it make you feel that Jesus says to love your enemies?

b. Make a list of who we might consider to be enemies. *(Bullies, criminals, terrorists.)*

c. How could you show love to these people?

d. Is it too hard or foolish to do so?

e. Have each student pick an enemy from the list and write (or say) a silent prayer for that person.

**Open the Catechism**

1. Read the Fifth and Eighth Commandments and Luther’s explanations for them.

**The Fifth Commandment:** You shall not kill.

*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do our neighbors no bodily harm nor cause them any suffering, but help and befriend them in every need.

**The Eighth Commandment:** You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, lie, or gossip about our neighbors, but defend them, speak well of them, and put the most charitable construction on all that they do.

a. How is Luther’s definition of murder different from the legal definition? Have students get into pairs and provide one piece of paper and something to write with for each pair. Explain that you are going to ask a question, then the person who has the pen and paper will write down one answer. After they’ve written down one answer, they will pass the paper to their partner, who will write down one answer and pass the paper back to the first partner, who will write down another answer, and so on until you call “time.” Give more time than is comfortable for this activity—some creative answers will appear when the obvious answers are done. The end result is a list that the pairs can share with the class. The question is, “According to Martin Luther, how do we break the Fifth Commandment?” (Answers may include killing, telling lies, bullying, ignoring someone who needs help, etc.)

b. Ask the class to take a look at the Eighth Commandment. How is this related to your discussion of the Fifth Commandment? What does it mean to interpret everything people do in “the best possible light”? Turn over the piece of paper you used to make the list, and tear it into two equal parts for you and your partner. Write down something you appreciate about that person, and give it to him or her.