

The Neighbour Path

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Date: 08 March 2026

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[0:00] Great. Thank you, Eden. And please keep your Bibles in Leviticus. Now, who has actually read Leviticus before?! Yeah, okay, right. So it's like foreign territory for many of us, right? Or the graveyard of all Bible reading plans.

You know, you start in Genesis and Exodus, and you're like, oh, what is this? And then, yeah. But you notice that love your neighbor as yourself phrase, right? That's where it first comes from in the book of Leviticus.

So I'm going to spend time there in this part of God's Word, but also a few other places, because today we're talking about the neighbor path, okay? What is the neighbor path? Remember, the last couple of weeks we've been going through kind of like, you know, what the Baptist World Alliance have been encouraging us to think about.

Five different pathways that we can travel as we follow the Lord Jesus, as we look back to what the Acts 2 church was like, the early church.

Walking down different paths to be following the way of Jesus. Last week we talked about the religious freedom path and how important that was for us as a church. And today we're going to be thinking about the neighbor path.

[1:08] But let me start by just telling you about the time I became a captain, all right? Probably have to qualify that, like what kind of captain, right? So I'm not a captain of a ship, not a captain of a sports team.

I have been a captain of a band team as well before, but we were C grade. We weren't very good. Captain of my street neighborhood thing.

I know that sounds very vague, but it was February 2020. We just moved into our very clean and tidy house in Pakuranga. It's not so clean and tidy, but it's still lovely. And then suddenly there was a call for street captains, you know?

Like, what's going on? You know, what's this virus that's been coming in? And we need to organize ourselves, all our streets, you know? And then our local MP said, could you nominate some street captains?

And so a few of us on the street said, okay, well, we're a bit of a panic mode. We don't know what's going on. And so a few of us put our hands up to be street captains. What that meant was we knocked on people's doors and said, do you want to join our WhatsApp group?

[2:16] We're going to just like keep each other updated. Like, and if we're like stuck at home and locked down, at least we can talk to each other. We can give each other updates. And so it was me and a few other people. And we're in this little group just coordinating, you know, helping people to walk through COVID times.

Yeah. So that was my experience being a COVID street captain and never again. Now, my observation from that time, it was a crazy time for all of us, was it started all really well at first, right? You know, in the moment, everyone was really passionate. Everyone wanted to help each other out and so on. But I was also part of the street captains Facebook page group thing. And you'd start to hear some other street captains and how they'd talk about their neighbors, how they'd talk about each other as street captains, you know.

Eventually, you started to notice, hey, there's a bit of fighting going on, right? Who made you a street captain, someone would say. Or it better not be anything political about this business.

It's so hard, isn't it, right? Even just in something ordinary, trying to be a help to your neighbor. What does it look like to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, as the Lord Jesus said to us?

[3:26] And to love your neighbor as yourself. In Mark chapter 12, right, Jesus is talking to the religious people. And they ask him, what's the most important commandment?

These are the two that Jesus replies, right? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. So how do we do that?

How do we build deep, meaningful relationships with our neighbors to bring Christ's love, hope, peace, hospitality to them? And I think it's quite hard to be a Christian neighbor or to be a neighbor, a Christian who's a good neighbor.

I think sometimes, I think, I don't know, media, film, TV shows, they kind of paint Christian neighbors in a pretty bad light, right? Who's watched The Simpsons, right?

Everyone knows that Homer Simpson's next door neighbor is a Christian, Ned Flanders, and he's a little bit dorky. And he's all, you know, people make fun of him, right? And maybe we're like, I don't want to be that guy, right?

[4:29] Or there's some young Sheldon, right? And their next door neighbor is Pastor Jeff, right? That really cuts me because I watch him and I have to watch my life too, right? If you're like me all too often, the way we exodize our religious freedom, sadly, is that we freely hide our faith before our neighbors, don't we?

Anyone ever talk to their, who knows their next door neighbor's name? Hands up? Okay. Who's told them that they go to church or they're a Christian? Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Few of us.

It's hard, isn't it? Right? Hard to be bold. Hard just to be an honest neighbor. Today, as we consider this pathway, the neighbor path, I want us to invite us to consider what the Bible says about loving our neighbors, right?

And so we heard that love our neighbors phrase from Leviticus. So we'll start there first. Let's think first about loving your neighbor in this old context, right?

So we'll skip through this. First, let's talk about this timeless instruction from our Lord God here in Leviticus chapter 19. Let me put those verses up again, particularly the ones at the end of the reading that Eden read.

[5:42] Listen again to these verses, right? Don't hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you're not sharing their guilt. Don't seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. That's how our phrase ends. Where are we? Well, we're in the Middle East. And that's the context where these words were spoken. The setting in Leviticus 19 is in Sinai after Moses has led the first generation of Israelite captives free from slavery in Egypt.

And actually, if you read in Exodus 40, it turns out that this is actually being said around kind of New Year's time. So we just celebrated Chinese New Year. There's a Jewish New Year.

All right. Happens around September. And this is a New Year's kind of pronouncement. And this is all being done after they have set up God's special tent called the tabernacle.

And Moses is standing. You want to imagine the scene. He's standing outside this tent of meeting. And he's anxious to hear all of God's instructions that he's to speak to the entire assembly of Israel.

[6:53] That's what Leviticus 19 verse 2 says. And when we look at this particular text, right, do you notice the pattern, right? In both verses. Can you see it?

Do not do something. But then do something. You see that? So there's a prohibition. And then there's an instruction. And then there's even a reason, right?

I am the Lord. But if you kind of scan up and down that chapter, works well in your paper Bibles or just scroll up and down, you're going to see in Leviticus that actually there's not just these two verses about neighbors.

Let me read out a few for you. It says, right, you know, verse 10, share your leftovers on your fields with the poor and the immigrants. They can glean, right?

We actually see this in the story of Ruth. Verse 13, don't defraud your neighbor or rob him. Don't be a scammer. Verse 13. Verse 15, judge your neighbor fairly.

[7:52] Verse 16, don't endanger your neighbor's life. And then later on, verse 34, love the sojourner, right, the people who travel through. For you were once sojourners yourselves.

Can you see how much loving your neighbor actually permeates through this chapter, even the book of Leviticus? Not just one or two verses. It goes right through.

And so, I don't know. My Bible, that's an NIV. They put in the headings. Those headings are put in by the editors and the translators. And mine just says, Leviticus 19, various laws.

I don't know what yours says. Surely, various laws is a little bit bland. Maybe inaccurate. I mean, look at all the different commands in Leviticus 19.

Can you see them? Right? If it's not about neighbors, it's actually about some serious business, right? What does verse 3 say? It says, oh, respect your mother and father.

[8:53] Verse 11. Don't steal. Don't lie. Don't give false testimony. Hang on. Does that ring a bell to anyone? What is Leviticus 19 trying to kind of echo?

Or what is it referring to? Anyone? What are these? Yeah, commandments. Which ones? From Jesus. That's right. Jesus repeated these commandments.

Yeah. But don't steal. Don't lie. Honor your father and mother. These are the 10 commandments, right? Reflected. Retought. For a new group of people.

A new setting. Just like those commandments that were carved on the stone tablets that Moses received from God. Here are some life-giving instructions that the Lord gives to his holy people. And they're instructions for every area of life. And I get it, right? We read half of Leviticus 19. It gets a little bit spicy, but tricky, the rest of the chapter.

[9:50] Come talk to me afterwards if you want to find out about not wearing, you know, mixed fibers and which haircuts are off limits and tattoos and other stuff. Yeah.

There's a good answer for most of those. For now, if you look at the whole of this chapter, it just talks about all kinds of things in life, doesn't it? And so maybe the heading I want to suggest to you in your Bible, so Leviticus 19 is this.

Holiness everywhere. Can you remember that? Holiness everywhere. Holiness everywhere.

Because that's how this chapter is introduced, right? Look at verse 2 again.

Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. Israel or God's people, this is your God speaking. The God who rescued you from slavery.

He says, you're saved by grace. Now live like who I am. Be holy because I'm holy. Can you see the pattern? Again, saved by grace and now to be shaped into his likeness, his holiness.

[10:54] Be holy as I, your God, am holy. This past week we've had some glorious weather, right? I know autumn has just officially started, but it does feel like summer.

And so well done again on you making it here on a beautiful sunny day. We had lots of people at the beach. We were at the beach too on Friday. We had a bit of a family fun day.

And this, some of you might recognize it, Takapuna Beach. Also, yeah, a very lovely place just to chill out and go for a swim. Yeah, it was fun.

We enjoyed the playground. It was just a beautiful Friday afternoon. Now, I don't know what your experience is when it comes to the beach.

Who is here and you're like, I'm all in at the beach, right? Yeah, yeah. Going straight into the water, that sort of thing. Yeah. And who in this group would be like, oh, beach, I'm going to get all my sun gear out and hide under an umbrella.

[11:56] Yeah, be honest. Yeah, it could be some of us. Yeah. No one's honest enough. Okay. All right. Yeah. We are an Asian church, you know. There must be some people like that, you know, covering up their sleeves and stuff. But look, yeah, probably the older generation.

Yep. Some of those. Some of our aunties and uncles. One thing that you'll know is that when we go to the beach, once you hit the sand, sand gets everywhere, doesn't it?

Yeah. Parents, you know this, like you're trying to clean your car after a day at the beach. Oh, man, you know, where don't you vacuum? That sort of thing. The thing with sand is that you're either sandy everywhere or you're not at all.

Right? There's no in-between state. Right? In the same way, you're either holy or you're not holy at all. You can't be a half-parent, can you?

I'm just a parent on Sundays and Tuesdays, right? The other time, she's going to talk to someone else. You can't be half-married. Oh, yeah. I'm married to my wife. And it's on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays.

[13:00] No, you can't do that. And I want to suggest, church, you can't be half-holy either. If you belong to the Lord, you are set apart.

That's what holiness means, to be set apart. And you're to live as his holy possession everywhere and including with our neighbors, including when surrounded by your classmates, including when sitting in the bathroom, including when standing at the checkout queue, including when you make eye contact with your neighbor.

Life in God's world is not like church and rest of the world. It's not holy here and then unholy the rest of your life. No. As one author put it, life in God's world should be lived with every moment holy.

That's the foundation so that we know what it looks like to love our neighbors, right? That's why this whole chapter in Leviticus, right, shapes how we view verse 18.

Verse 18 is not just part of a bunch of various laws. Verse 18 is an example of how holiness should be everywhere in your life. No area of your life or my life is off-limits to God's transforming work, including how we love our neighbors.

[14:18] That must be part of what God is doing in your life too, where God can have permission to change you, ask you to repent, do something different, live more selflessly to reflect the Lord.

So I hope you can see this, right? Leviticus 19:18, this really important instruction that Jesus quoted comes from timeless instruction from our Lord God about holiness that needs to be everywhere in your life.

And so when we come to the New Testament, when we come to the Gospels, when we come to our Lord Jesus quoting Leviticus, right, he was living in a time, right, that he was up against religious leaders who had taken holiness, this idea of being set apart, and they kind of put it in a sandbox.

Who knows what a sandbox is? A sandbox is where there's sand, but it's in a box, right? Duh. Kids love playing in them, but the sand is controlled, right? It's a very controlled environment.

In coding or if you do web development, you make sandboxes and you build code and it doesn't break the rest of your website, that sort of thing. This is how the Pharisees, the religious leaders, had built faith.

[15:34] Here are all the rules that you follow, but it only applies to this area of life. That kind of faith is shallow, isn't it? It doesn't go very deep. This was what faith was like by the time Jesus came.

And external outward displays of holiness looks good on the outside, but not letting Jesus transform every part of your life. And this was very evident in particular when these religious leaders in Jesus' day talked about neighbors.

And, you know, here's the context. You know this well. You know, one of the teachers of the law says, oh, what's the most important law? And then Jesus says, love the God. All your heart, mind, soul is direct.

Love your neighbors yourself. In Luke's version of this exchange, this kind of exchange, the legal expert, the lawyer, he then replies, who's my neighbor?

I'll just scroll over. All right. Verse 29. He wanted to justify himself. So the lawyer, he asked Jesus, and who's my neighbor? You can almost hear the man dividing up his life, right?

[16:45] Who's my neighbor, right? I want to love my wife, right? I want to love my kids. I want to love my other fancy pants friends that, you know, give me favors, invite me to parties. But surely that will tick the box.

Aren't those my neighbors? Who's my neighbor? Is that how we think today? Have a think about it in your heads. I'll just love one or two people on my street. That's fine.

I don't need to love the annoying neighbor with their loud music. Surely I can ignore the weird lady I see on the bus. Surely that neurodiverse kind of autistic person, I can just give them a wide berth. To this kind of attitude, Jesus, he tells a story, doesn't he? And the story goes like this. There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Typical bloke taking a typical public transport route in the Middle East at that time.

And a victim of injustice. He's robbed. He's left for dead. And then two religious leaders with their sandboxed holy lives, holy in quotation marks, they just walk past because they're too busy staying in their holy huddle.

[17:55] And it's the Samaritan, the outcast, that rescues this poor man, that shows true neighbor love.

The story is meant to shame those of us who do religion in a sandbox. Who do fake outward holiness at church and then don't live the rest of our lives the same way.

It's to shame us even. You see, church, to love your neighbor, you have to be a living sacrifice without being favorites. Matt Martins, he puts it this way.

Don't ask who your neighbor is, but ask who you are to your neighbor. You get that? Don't ask who your neighbor is. Ask who you are to your neighbor.

Are you a Christian? Then your identity in Christ doesn't just disappear outside church. No. To live like Christ must mean you extend Christ-likeness, holiness to every area of your life, including your apartment block, your schoolhouse, your Discord channel.

[19:03] When your holiness consistently shows Christ to everyone, man, that's power, isn't it?

Power to change your neighborhood, change people. That's power that comes from loving your neighbor as yourself. Because the gospel, right, was this. Our Lord Jesus Christ, he gave his life for two neighbors, two strangers beside him.

You remember that scene in Calvary? Our Lord Jesus died for his neighbors. Nailed to the cross. I mean, one taunted him. The other defended him. This man has done nothing wrong. Our Lord Jesus, he was holiness in human form. Miracle worker, yes.

But fully God, fully man, did not deserve what he got on the cross. He was the perfect neighbor for you. And he willingly endured death on a cross for your sins, for your lack of love, for your pick-and-mix holiness.

[20:13] The gospel is this. Christ gave his life for his neighbors. And he invites every person in our community to put their trust in him. And from this good news, the timeless instruction from Jesus begins to make sense, doesn't it?

And so holiness, you know, this timeless instruction from the Old Testament, comes through our Lord Jesus. And now it should move us to walk along the neighbor path, shouldn't it?

It did for the early church, you know. Acts chapter 2, verse 46. It's our last time in the book of Acts for a bit. I remember this little phrase, this little section of the book of Acts.

When the church was born, people really got who Jesus was. This is the description of how church worked. Isn't it amazing? Every day they continued to meet together.

They broke bread in their homes. They ate together with glad and sincere hearts. Can you imagine the neighborly love that can pour out of that kind of passion? But don't forget, church, how they got to this point.

[21:20] Acts 2, verse 46. The fruit of this church, this amazing redeemed community, comes. It came after they heard about the gospel. They heard Peter preach to them, You crucified Jesus.

And you need to repent. You need to join the church. You need to identify, be baptized with the church community in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you're going to get the Holy Spirit.

He's going to help you to do all kinds of things, including loving your neighbor well. To walk the neighbor path, that's the journey we walk through, isn't it?

Out of the heart, the mouth speaks. Out of repentance and faith, hands and feet of Jesus, reach out to our neighbors in need.

It's out of God's grace that people are born who are devoted to doing good. And so, church, you and I, we are part of something bigger.

[22:17] We may look like 30, 40-odd people here, but we are part of something bigger. We are part of the Baptist movement in New Zealand. They've done a really lovely job. They've taken these five pathways and kind of like translated it into Māori, Nete Reo Māori, really just thought how to contextualize it.

And the key word that they just use for the neighbor path is friend, right? And then in Māori, they use the word whakafanau ngatanga, which means kind of like a weaving together of people, of building relationships with each other.

Imagine if everyone could reliably bump into a committed Christian in your street. You or someone else. Could that be possible?

Now, there are all kinds of ways we could love our neighbors. Actively, intentionally, right? Here are some suggestions from, you know, the Baptist World Alliance.

I mean, even walking down this path could be as simple as knowing your neighbor's name, right?

Your next-door neighbor. And praying for their salvation. And I'm not always very good at this. I pray for lots of things, and then I forget, Oh, my next-door neighbor, Kay, she's 90 years old now.

[23:32] Lord, would you bring her to know you? Or her son, adult son, Mark. Maybe that could be you. Pray for you. Get to know your neighbor.

Be polite. Ask their name kindly. You know, don't stalk them. But pray for them. Get to know them. Or maybe you want to run along this neighbor path, okay? You could be someone.

If you have a home, you've got a spare chair, why don't you invite someone over to your house and intentionally share a meal with them? Get to know them. Be curious about their lives. And hopefully they'll be curious about your life, your church, your faith.

Or maybe you might want to put your hand up next time and soar, in a sense, you know. Jump on the captain, street captain thing if it ever comes up again. But I'm sure there are lots of other groups out there.

The Kiwi Baptists, they've really framed it really nicely. Are you forming relationships of connection and belonging to your friends and family? And there's another question that you can ask as well.

[24:34] Are we as a church, or are you as a family of believers, are we intentionally present where people are looking for belonging in our community? It's a funny thing, you know.

I don't know why we started. I think because our friends, our cousins kind of twisted our arms and got us along. We started going to Park Run, 8 a.m.

Hundreds of people looking for belonging. Looking for connection, right? Through running, right?

Are we there? There's a few of us members who are there, but could we be in there?

Could we be in other places? Our local sports club? Our workmates gathering together after Friday night, Friday afternoon? Where can you be present to love your neighbor?

Let's pray. Lord, our actions do speak louder than words. And yet, Lord, your living word speaks loudest into all our actions and informs them and shapes them.

[25:42] So thank you, Lord, for this word. Would you help us to keep it simple, but to do what you ask us to do. Help us love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And, Lord, help us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen. Church, let's respond with just singing a song.

I picked this song. It's called Undivided. So hopefully, Chris, it's on the YouTube. So, yeah, and you're ready to bring it up. And so stand if you're able to or want to. And we're going to sing through this song.

The lyrics hopefully will show up. And as we sing through, let's remind each other. Let's use this as a prayer to live an undivided life for our King. Yes, Lord, sanctify us, make us holy, and help us to live for you, the one who died for us.

We thank you, Lord. Amen.