

Neighborliness Group Study

My prayer is that the end of this book would be the beginning of the conversation.

Our relationship with Jesus begins as an inward journey that naturally leads to exploring how our faith is expressed in the context of community. I encourage you to share the next part of this journey with a group of friends.

The following study guide includes suggestions on how to organize conversations. I have provided conversation prompts, but feel free to let your discussions flow freely and naturally. Depending on each person's upbringing, the way this book is processed will be very different. As you listen and learn, you'll see that each person can help the group explore the spirit of neighborliness from various perspectives.

The Bible describes the posture and character of folks who are learning to express the spirit of neighborliness. We should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry (James 1:19). Let curiosity lead the way as you hear the thoughts and experiences of your friends. Extend and receive grace freely. God is honored when His children pursue unity.

I am hopeful that this book will give you tools to have meaningful conversations that lead to new friendships as you find the beauty of God across dividing lines.

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INTRODUCTION The Day I Opened My Eyes

Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.

Hebrews 13:1–3

Discussion Prompts:

1. Why did you decide to read this book and participate in this conversation?
2. What stood out to you after reading the introduction?
3. Can you relate to the idea of silence?
4. How do you respond when you witness injustice?
5. Do you have a person or group of people you feel comfortable engaging with in challenging conversations?

Next Step: Start with prayer. Pray that God would help you to see the beauty of God across dividing lines.

CHAPTER ONE

The Other Half of the Greatest Commandment

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” No other commandment is greater than these.

Mark 12:30–31

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter One?
2. Define *neighbor* in your own words.
3. Define *neighborliness* in your own words.
4. Do my friendships reflect the diversity in my city?
Why or why not?
5. What are some practical ways to love your neighbor?

Next Step: Continue to learn. Choose one of the recommended resources to read or watch in the next week.

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CHAPTER TWO A Tale of Two Cities

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

Matthew 7:12

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Two?
2. We explored the stories of Andrea, Jasmine, Jamila, Eric, and Grandma Sadie. Which of these people do you relate to the most?
3. What comes to mind when you hear the word *gentrification*?
4. Describe *helping networks* in your own words.
5. How can your faith work for everyone around you?

Next Step: Listen to the song “Gentrify” by an artist named Propaganda to get an overview of gentrification. Look up the lyrics and follow along.

CHAPTER THREE

A Look Inward

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Psalm 139:23–24

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Three?
2. Describe *inattentional blindness* in your own words.
3. Describe *implicit bias* in your own words.
4. What is the difference between *not racist* and *antiracist*?
5. Discuss Dr. Brian Blount's idea that we must identify cultural boundaries in need of kingdom trespass.

Next Step: Pray the same way David did in Psalm 139:23–24. After asking God to search your heart, write down the areas you sense the Holy Spirit is challenging you to address from this reading.

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CHAPTER FOUR Reconsidering Reconciliation and Inclusion

After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.

Revelation 7:9

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Four?
2. Throughout history, how has the church been complicit in racism and inequality?
3. Throughout history, how has the church been courageous in addressing racism and inequality?
4. Discuss the difference between *racial reconciliation* and *racial conciliation*.
5. Do you believe that racial representation is the same as unity? Why or why not?

Next Step: Watch Mark Charles' TED Talk, "The Truth Behind 'We the People'—the Three Most Misunderstood Words in US History."⁶²

CHAPTER FIVE

From One Generation to the Next

Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power.

Psalm 145:4

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Five?
2. Desmond Tutu said that if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. Explain why you agree or disagree.
3. The rich and the poor are neighbors in cities. Does proximity naturally lead to relationships?
4. What are ways you can creatively cultivate opportunities to learn about racial and economic inequality?
5. Would you be willing to sit with a friend at Woolworth's lunch counter?

Next Step: Watch Dr. Lucretia Berry's TED Talk, "Children Will Light Up the World if We Don't Keep Them in the Dark."⁶³

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CHAPTER SIX Learning to Lament

*I am sick at heart. How long, O LORD, until you restore me?
Return, O LORD, and rescue me. Save me because of your
unfailing love.*

Psalm 6:3–4

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Six?
2. How many songs can you think of that express God-honoring lament?
3. Describe and discuss the meaning of healthy lament.
4. Jemar Tisby said that racism in America has *adapted* since the abolishment of slavery. Do you agree or disagree? Explain why or why not.
5. Have you ever corporately or personally grieved the loss of somebody you didn't know?

Next Step: Watch Ava DuVernay's documentary 13TH.

CHAPTER SEVEN

We Belong to One Another

God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

1 Corinthians 12:6–7

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Seven?
2. How can language like *those people* and *them* create unhealthy distance between neighbors?
3. How do events like natural disasters and global pandemics highlight underlying issues of inequality in our society?
4. How can you embody the love of Christ to your neighbors?
5. How would your city be different if everyone truly belonged to one another?

Next Step: Have a conversation with a friend outside of this study group about one thing you are learning.

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CHAPTER EIGHT Toxic Charity

*There is joy for those who deal justly with others and always
do what is right.*

Psalm 106:3

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Eight?
2. Describe *toxic charity* in your own words.
3. Discuss the different perspectives of Roman, Todd, David, Lisa, and Michael.
4. How can a posture of humility and curiosity lead to healthy expressions of volunteerism?
5. How can outreach programs become more meaningful if relationships are built between donors, volunteers, and the recipients of needed resources?

Next Step: Make a list of three nonprofit organizations in your city that align with your interest and passion. Familiarize yourself with their work in the community. Pray about your potential involvement.

CHAPTER NINE

Everyone Participates

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11–12

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Nine?
2. Describe *social capital* in your own words.
3. Discuss how education can equal action.
4. Is God biased toward the rich or the poor? Discuss why or why not?
5. What is your first response when you come into close proximity with someone in need?

Next Step: Prayerfully narrow the list of three nonprofit organizations down to one that you can engage in relationship and service. Continue to pray that the Holy Spirit would lead you to discern when and how to best support their mission.

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CHAPTER TEN The City Beautiful

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:9–10

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Ten?
2. Describe and discuss *asset-based community development*, *collective impact*, and *place-based initiatives*.
3. How can your church participate in a *collective impact strategy* with other churches and organizations in your community?
4. If you created an asset map of your community, what would be included?
5. Describe your version of The City Beautiful.

Next Step: Slowly read and reflect on 2 Chronicles 7:14. Write a prayer and declare it over your city.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Restore and Rebuild

No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people.

Isaiah 58:6

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Eleven?
2. How was the corporate fast displeasing to God in Isaiah 58?
3. Why did the rich young ruler experience sadness?
4. How has the influence of the spirit of mammon led to decisions in your life? How does the Sabbath directly oppose the spirit of mammon?
5. Isaiah 58:12 describes a unique calling to those who are anointed to bring about citywide reform. If this resonates in your spirit, discuss this with your group.

Next Step: Practice Sabbath rest. For more information on the Sabbath, Abraham Joshua Heschel's book, *The Sabbath*, is a powerful story of a family that centered their week around the rhythm of work and rest.

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CHAPTER TWELVE Already and Not Yet

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.

All these things are gone forever.

Revelation 21:4

Discussion Prompts:

1. What stood out to you after reading Chapter Twelve?
2. How do you see the *already* being expressed in your community?
3. How do you see the *not yet* being expressed in your community?
4. If neighborliness is expressed one person at a time, where can you begin?
5. Describe one of the most challenging and encouraging things you will take away from reading *Neighborliness: Finding the Beauty of God Across Dividing Lines*.

Next Step: Choose to engage. Refuse to ignore.