



How to Love Your Neighbor

without being weird

SPECIAL BONUS CHAPTER!
UPDATED
PANDEMICS, PROTESTS, POLITICS & MORE

AMY LIVELY

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Pandemics, Protests, Politics... & More

This decade is off to a rough start. So far, the 2020's are marked by a deadly global pandemic, distressing racial tensions, divisive partisan politics, and white-knuckle economic uncertainty.

When I'm stressed—and who isn't?—loving my neighbor is a command I admit I want to ignore. Not only could they infect me, but they probably hate me. Am I right or am I right?

Well, I am wrong. There's still no exception clause to the second-greatest commandment—

**"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."
This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your
neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37–39**

I still have every excuse in the book for not loving my neighbor, and a few new ones now—but there's still no asterisk or exemption to get me off the hook.

But wait, there's more

My company counsels independent retail store owners and builds ecommerce websites. Early in 2020, most of our customers had to shut down their stores, which meant laying off their employees and the possibility of losing everything they had worked for their entire career. Several of our customers' stores were destroyed by rioters and looters. Our online services offered a little bit of hope when in-person shopping was off the table, a chance to recoup some of the staggering losses.

We were as prepared for this crisis as anyone can be: we already work remotely, and we recently hired and trained new staff who were ready to jump in. Most importantly, we begin each week by praying together as a team. In a season where millions find themselves unemployed, we're grateful for the work. Our entire team has been working hard for months on end, bearing our customers' burdens even while dealing with changes affecting our own families and the personal impact of the upheaval happening all around us. We are bone tired and wrung out.

Meanwhile, my friends and acquaintances were feuding over opinions, fighting about policies, bickering about politics, drawing lines in the proverbial sand and challenging anyone who dared to cross them. Then my best



friend's husband passed away. A dear friend was hospitalized for seven months, with only a handful of visitors. Another friend's father died, then her mother's home was washed away in a dam collapse. Yet another friend was hospitalized with mental health issues.

These things would have been devastating enough in 2019 or 2020, but in the 2020's the terribleness and awfulness of ordinary life was amplified. In the middle of a global pandemic, in the midst of worldwide social unrest, we found ourselves in our own mess—earthshattering, heartbreaking events right in our own homes.

Around the world and right on your street, our neighbors are dealing with deeply personal problems that far outweigh the current crisis of the day. They still have cancer. They still have car accidents. Their kids are still suicidal, their marriages are still struggling. Their parents still have Alzheimer's. Their loved ones are still making bad decisions with big consequences.

This new normal is anxiety on steroids. It's sad and scary, and they are desperate for hope. They are looking for answers, they are searching for relief. We all are. Our neighbors are watching to see how we respond when our faith in Christ collides with "these uncertain times".



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IN OUR OWN MESS -
EARTHSHATTERING,
HEARTBREAKING
EVENTS IN OUR
OWN HOMES.



In a pandemic, little things mean a lot

After weeks and weeks of endless work, I literally cried real tears when my neighbor, Debbie, texted and offered to drop off dinner. From across the street, she must have heard me wearily say to my husband, "I wish a plate of food would magically appear in front of me."

Daily kindnesses like this keep us all going, and small gestures mean more than ever when so many big things have been taken away. We've shared packages of toilet paper and made masks for our neighbors, supported our local businesses and food pantries, cleaned up storefronts and neighborhoods damaged by riots, and linked arms with neighbors who have been overlooked for far too long. Sometimes it's hard to know what to do or how to help in the new age we're living in, and just when we think we might get a little break from loving our neighbor, we realize this is exactly when we are needed most.

You have everything you need to love your neighbor—yes, even in a pandemic with uprisings and a dash of politics during our personal problems. When Jesus instructs us to love our neighbor, He equips to do it well. God won't send us into the world empty handed! He enables us to love and serve well with spiritual gifts.

A spiritual gift is a supernatural ability given to each believer from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of fulfilling God's commands.

We met my neighbor Lauren in Chapter 7, *Unwrapping Your Gifts* (p. 121). Lauren's spiritual gifts of mercy and service were the catalyst for "Neighbors Helping Neighbors," a plan to match community needs with available volunteers. She also started a neighborhood newsletter and Facebook group which led to a Neighborhood Watch, Pizza Potluck Block Party, community yard sales, and even baby showers and diaper drives for our neighbors. My neighbor Debbie blessed me with her gifts of helping, service, and exhortation (she also has wisdom, teaching, and mercy—and is a wonderful cook!).

There are three lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament that use 20 different Greek words; they are found in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. Spiritual gifts are foremost for the church and the kingdom. But since COVID-19, we spend about a zillion hours at home and a few minutes watching church online—also at home. So, let's explore natural ways to apply our spiritual gifts in our neighborhoods in our "new normal". I've picked a few that are especially useful these days. In alphabetical order, they are –

Spiritual Gifts

Administration—The ability to plan, organize, supervise, and direct people toward the accomplishment of goals. Now, you can organize a food drive and make sure all of your neighbors have groceries and masks and a list of emergency phone numbers.

Evangelism—The fervent desire to share the Good News of the Gospel. Evangelists lead people to Christ on airplanes and in line at the grocery store. Bible verses ooze out of the person with this gift, and they carry tracts in their car. During social distancing, evangelists make phone calls or knock on doors before stepping back 6' to check on their neighbors hearts as well as their homes.

Exhortation—To encourage, comfort, console, and counsel when anyone calls. The Greek word for exhortation, *parakaleō*, means “to call to one’s side.” Now, they’ll be at the top of the list of people to call when you don’t think you can handle this another day.

Faith—Utter conviction about God’s power and promises that is unshaken by circumstances or obstacles. A person with the gift of faith is a prayer warrior who is happily dependent on God. They take big risks expecting God to show up and show off. They’re certain God is using our current trials for His good purposes even while facing the hardship head on.

Giving—The ability to share your material resources cheerfully and without thinking of how you’re going to be repaid. This gift is measured by the size of your heart, not your wallet—although this person does enjoy making significant financial gifts. What’s yours is theirs and you feel blessed to have a square of toilet paper to share—even the soft kind.

Healing—To be used by God to make others whole either physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. Healers are a conduit for God’s power. You will be drawn to those who are hurting in mind, body, or spirit. The healers among us are carrying a heavy burden right now as they bear our pain on every level.

Helps—A helper gives support or assistance that frees others for ministry. You have to look hard for this person, because they happily hide in the wings and behind the scenes at church—yet they’re indispensable to those with more recognizable faces. They’re busy volunteering at the food pantry and they walk the neighbor’s dog after they do home school.

Knowledge—An intelligence and understanding of Christianity. A person with this gift is a fact-gatherer, an analyzer, an information storehouse. They love learning, research, and investigation. This is not necessarily the person who knows every theory and research study about coronavirus or sniffs out fake news, but they do comprehend how these events are impacting the Kingdom.

Leadership—The ability to manage and motivate others to get involved. Leaders constantly come up with new ideas. This year, they are overcoming obstacles and figuring out how to get things done in the way that is safest for everyone.

Mercy—Sensitivity and sympathy toward those who are suffering. People with the gift of mercy are moved with compassion; they take action to alleviate other people’s pain. Many of our essential healthcare workers, doctors, and nurses were drawn to this field because of their gift of mercy.

Miracles—To be enabled by God with strength, power, and ability to perform supernatural feats that result in praise to God. In these uncertain times, they’ll often be around when people experience inexplicable protection and provision.



Pastor—A shepherd who finds and saves lost sheep then loves them, patches their wounds, shares their lives, and keeps watch for predators. Pastorally gifted people care deeply about others' needs and growth. These days, they've got their eyes peeled for the lonely and neglected who are desperate for companionship.

Service—The gift of knowing what needs to be done and doing it without being asked. They can't come to your online meeting because they're making contactless deliveries all over the neighborhood or taking a neighbor to a doctor appointment.

Teaching—The ability to clearly explain and instruct others. A teacher takes complicated material and makes it seem simple. She's leading Zoom meetings on how to make sourdough bread and homemade cleaning supplies, how to research your ballot and where to vote, how to identify racism and how to overcome it.

Wisdom—The ability to apply spiritual knowledge in practical ways in everyday life. A wise person is circumspect, seeing all sides of a situation, including extenuating circumstances and potential consequences. They're known for street smarts and common sense. Now, you will help people make decisions based on the best information—and reevaluate as needed. The wisest people know they don't know everything.

You'll have the opportunity to take a spiritual gifts test in your Next Best Steps.

Open mouth, insert foot

Peter had the gifts of apostleship, tongues, evangelism, healing, teaching, knowledge, and was uniquely gifted at speaking. Trouble was, he didn't always know what to say! Peter didn't let that stop him from opening his mouth and inserting his foot on a regular basis.

From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!" Matthew 16:21-22

Peter thought he had the spiritual gift of rebuke, which you may recall is not on any list. Can't you picture Peter rolling his eyes at Jesus, taking Him by the elbow, and leading the Messiah aside so the other disciples couldn't hear their conversation? "Suffering? Many terrible things? Being killed? Heaven forbid, Jesus—this should never happen to you!" I'm right there with Peter in my prayers:

—Heaven forbid there be any sickness or disease: I want healing now, this minute.

—Heaven forbid I get one more heartbroken text: I want a happy message for a change.

—Heaven forbid someone suffer the consequences of their own decisions: I want them to do life right the first time by following my instructions.

—Heaven forbid we face our oppressive past: I want the illusion of peace.

—Heaven forbid the other candidate be elected: I want my vote to win.

—Heaven forbid we have another shutdown: I want normalcy.

When Peter expressed his desire that Christ would avoid suffering, rejection, and death (and the subsequent resurrection, by the way), Jesus gave him one of the sharpest rebukes in Bible history—

Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.” Matthew 16:23

Looking at the 2020’s—or any season of suffering—from a human point of view is a dangerous trap to us, too. Expectations of all-good outcomes will always disappoint. Not only is this type of wishful thinking dangerous, Jesus says it’s actually from Satan. One of the devil’s sneakiest strategies is to make us comfortable and satisfied, needing nothing and lacking for little. When—CRASH!—real life collides with false hopes, we become battered, bruised, and bitter.

I’m tempted to run the other way from pain and suffering, discomfort and inconvenience. (Actually, I walk away very slowly, because running is too strenuous.) But there is spiritual value in suffering that we can miss when we’re too comfortable. The trials we’re experiencing as a global community, as a nation, and as individuals in our own homes have the potential to turn our hearts toward God. Faith grows deep when planted in dark places.



Prejudice and Protests: Behind our neighbors’ doors

Midway through 2020, we were shocked and saddened by the murder of George Floyd. Some rightful rallies became wrongful riots, but that cannot be allowed to detract from the voices that protest racism, prejudice, inequality, and injustice still rampant in our society.

We first learned about seven areas which have shaped every culture in every generation in Chapter 4, *Don’t Be Weird* (beginning on p. 80). Let’s listen to what some of our Black neighbors might say is happening in each of these areas behind the doors of their homes:

Family—Your Black neighbors make up 12-15% of the citizens in the U.S., but 21% of the poor population. Black children under the age of 18 in your neighborhood are three times more likely to live in poverty than White children (31% and 10%, respectively). Black children are more likely to grow up without a father in their home, and their mothers are less likely to be married. Our Black neighbors have an increased risk of illness from COVID-19 in every age group, as well as higher comorbidities of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and stroke. They are overrepresented in positive Coronavirus tests (25%) and COVID-related deaths (40%). Compared to Whites, nearly twice as many Black adults say they know someone who has died from the virus. Regardless of the pandemic, White men in your neighborhood live 4.6 years longer than Black men (76.1 years compared to 71.5 years); White women live 3.1 years longer than Black women (81 years compared to 77.9 years).

Government—Your Black adult neighbors are about five times as likely as Whites to say they’ve been unfairly stopped by police because of their race or ethnicity. They are more likely to be arrested; once arrested, they are more likely to be convicted; once convicted, they are more likely to experience lengthy prison sentences. Black adults are 5.9 times as likely to be incarcerated than Whites. One of every three Black boys born in your town in 2001 could expect to go to prison in his lifetime, compared to one of every seventeen White boys. People of color are underrepresented in state and federal government; there are currently no Black governors and there have been only ten Black U.S. Senators since 1870.

Religion—Praises are rising from the Black churches in our country! Black neighbors are more likely than any other race to be absolutely certain about their belief in God (83% compared to 61% for Whites). People of

color often say religion is very important in their life, attend religious services at least once a week, and pray daily. Among Blacks who convert to another religion, 49% convert to Islam while 6% convert to Christianity.

Education—If the students at the schools in your community are predominantly minority, they are much less likely to have teachers who meet certification standards or hold higher-level degrees. The elementary students walking past your house with their lunch boxes and backpacks will score nearly 50 percentile points lower on achievement tests if they are assigned to ineffective teachers for three years in a row. Black students are more likely to be suspended or expelled, less likely to be placed in gifted programs, and subject to lower expectations from their teachers. While 85% of all U.S. high school students will receive their diploma, only 79% of Black students do so. Four-year college degrees are handed out to 30% of Whites in the U.S. but only 17.3% of Blacks.

Business— When they apply for a job in your town, Whites receive on average 36% more callbacks than your Black coworkers. When they are hired in a full-time position, White adults earn an average of \$890 per week while Black adults take home \$682 (White men: \$910, Black men: \$710; White women: \$795, Black women: \$657). Forty-one percent of Black-owned businesses in your town closed during COVID-19, compared to 15% of White-owned businesses. Your Black friends are 67% more likely to be unemployed during the pandemic, but are less likely to receive unemployment benefits—and they are not being re-employed as quickly as White workers.

Arts and Entertainment—When you watch a sporting event with your neighbors, 70% of the professional football players will be Black, as will 81% of professional basketball players and 8% of Major League Baseball players—but less than 10% of all team owners are Black. When you go see a movie, only five of the Black people you see in the credits were nominated for Oscars in 2020 (down from 15 in 2019, 13 in 2018, and 18 in 2017); they are also underrepresented as producers, directors, and writers.

Media—Most of our neighbors believe the news media does not understand them; however, our Black neighbors feel misunderstood because of their race, age, and gender (34% compared to 10% for Whites). Black males are underrepresented in positive roles and overrepresented in negative associations, resulting in general antagonism toward Black men. In the aftermath of the death of George Floyd, Black adults are more likely than Whites to use social media to encourage others to take action (45% vs 30%) and post a picture to support a cause (48% to 33%).

More of our Black neighbors think it would be very effective to bring interracial communities together to talk about race (44% compared to 29% of Whites), work to elect Black representatives (40% to 23%), and organize protests and rallies (34% vs 14%). If racially diverse neighbors did have a conversation about how to become the land of equal opportunity our country strives to be, we would agree that working locally with Black neighbors would be very effective.

That's a lot to talk about—and we haven't even touched on the long-lasting impact on mental and emotional health, economic stability and viability, and self-esteem. Each data point represents a soul beloved by God, and hopefully loved by their neighbor, too.

Is your heart broken yet?

Statistical analysis and surfing the web will only take us so far, so I turned to my friends Tiffany Edwards and Amy Carroll for advice. Tiffany, who is Black, is one of the founders of ONE CHURCH, an online discussion group for rich and respectful conversations about racial issues from a Christian perspective. ONE CHURCH welcome anyone who wants to have questions answered, who wants to better understand the perspective of others and who, most importantly, wants to honor God regarding race in the world

today. Amy, who is White, is an author and speaker for Proverbs 31 Ministries. Tiffany and Amy have joined their hearts and hands to address racism, beginning with their sincere friendship.

“These days, I feel God calling me to use my voice for Him in winsome, compelling ways,” Amy said, as she offered to share what she’s learning. “I’ve heard people say, ‘Being nice to a Black person does not solve our problem.’ These people are focused on systemic racism, which is an enormous and real problem,” Amy patiently explained to me. What exactly is “systemic racism”? The president of the NAACP defined it as “systems and structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantages African Americans. Structural racism prevents or makes it more challenging for people of color to participate in society and in the economy.” It’s difficult for me to comprehend how one person can impact the complex, deep-seated, longstanding racial problems we face.

“It is systemic, which makes some people think this issue isn’t between individuals. I disagree!” Amy exclaimed. “It’s not either/or. It’s not mutually exclusive. Individual relationships and systemic racism cannot be divorced from one another.” She sees this clearly in Scripture—

**Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.
Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:8-9 (ESV)**

Reading these two verses together in the context of racial reconciliation for the first time, Amy shouted, “Holy smokes! Love and hospitality are linked together! The proximity created by hospitality is part of the solution to our race problem in America. Proximity and hospitality build relationships, and relationships turn into love,” she elaborated. “When there’s love, there’s less furor around race. When there’s deep love like I have for the Black friends in my life, you begin to care about the things that affect them. You care about the problems they have and want to help find solutions.” The first step toward a solution is to listen to our neighbors.



Listen up

In a culture that would rather shout loudly than listen, it’s good to define some parameters. “The biggest misconception I’ve had about listening is that listening is equal to agreeing. It’s not!” Amy explained. “Listening is simply equal to love. When we listen with love, we can listen to people we don’t agree with so that we gain understanding.”

Listening is a learned skill. Here are some listening tips that actually work in every relationship:

- **BE SINCERE** This means phones are turned off or left in the next room. Make eye contact as you listen with your whole heart.
- **BE QUIET** Don’t formulate your response as you’re listening. Don’t interrupt to tell your own story during their story. Don’t explain yourself or offer excuses. Repeat what the other person has said to ensure you understand. “What I hear you saying is [restate what they said]. Is that right?”
- **BE PATIENT** Don’t try to set everything straight in one conversation. There will be time to clear up any misconceptions after a relationship is formed. Let the Holy Spirit speak; it’s not all up to you.
- **BE APPROPRIATE** Don’t ask deep questions in a shallow relationship. Talk about family, hobbies, history, and common concerns as you gradually build a friendship.
- **BE INFORMED** “White people are responsible for their own education,” Amy advises. “There are many books, podcasts, and videos so that you can listen and learn from other people’s stories.” When

you have a question about race, start with Google then ask a real girlfriend. Amy has kindly put together a list of her favorite resources you can download for free at her website, www.amycarroll.org/race-education-resources.

To listen well, it's essential that we have actual friends—not mere acquaintances—who are different races. “Friendship is sharing meals, doing fun stuff together, having conversations, sharing hurts and pains. We have the opportunity in our neighborhood to intentionally develop interracial friendships.”

Feel the feels

The next step toward racial reconciliation in our hearts and our homeland is to leverage our feelings. As Amy kindly explains, “God has feelings, and He’s given us feelings not to manipulate us but to connect us with Him. The absolute sorrow we then have to deal with is something we Americans don’t like. We are pain-avoidant people! We’re tempted to numb out to the pain around us. When we connect our heart to God’s, we’ll start to seek solutions.”

“The outbursts we see on our streets are manifesting what’s been festering and bottled up inside,” Amy empathizes. “I believe God is heartbroken as he sees the dissension among all His children made in His image. I think He is particularly grief stricken that the church in the past has ignored and even justified racism, and that there’s so much deflection now.”

You can’t read very far in your Bible without feeling God’s heart toward the oppressed. Do you think God would put up with racism in America (or anywhere else)—whether it’s baked into systems or bared in backyards? The short answer is: no, He would not. His heart is to set the burdened free, bring good news to the poor, and heal the afflicted (Luke 4:16-21). Our job? Get out of God’s way, or get on His team.

We are on the wrong side of Scripture if we don’t move past feelings of denial, anger, justification, deflection, avoidance, victimization, or blame. We’re getting closer to our Father’s heart when we allow ourselves to experience compassion, mercy, empathy, outrage, and sadness along with hope, confidence, peace, and love.

Do something amazing

Once we’ve listened to others and leaned into our emotions, we will naturally want to take a leap of faith. Here are three actions you can take to become be part of the race solution:

- **MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR** Even during a pandemic, it’s possible to intentionally cross the street to meet our cross-race neighbors. While practicing all safety recommendations, invite a neighbor over for dinner on the deck or hot chocolate in the driveway. Take the time to engage in conversation with a neighbor you don’t know well.
- **TAKE A CLASS** Two courses Amy Carroll recommends are “[Be the Bridge 101](#)” and “[What LIES Between Us](#)”. Both are available online and can be done within small groups. Prepare to see things from a very different point of view, and pray for your heart to be softened to receive hard truths.
- **VOLUNTEER** Serve in the community or church with a cross-race friend. Martin Luther King Day (the third Monday in January) is also the MLK Day of Service. Search for local volunteer opportunities on MLK Day and throughout the year [at the Points of Light website](#).

Embrace the awkward

Unlike Tiffany and Amy, most of us talk with people who look [just like us](#) on social media, with 75% of White Americans and 65% of Black Americans reporting that their social network of friends is entirely of the same

race, without any input from friends of other races. This makes it more than a little bit awkward to start cross-racial conversations in real life. Connecting with people who look different helps reduce prejudice, which is why it's so important to diversify relationships for the 40% of White Americans and 25% of non-White Americans who are surrounded by friends exclusively of the same race.

Remember that uncomfortable moment when you first knocked on your neighbor's door, and the embarrassing conversation when you admitted you didn't know their name? We talked about it in Chapter 8, *Say What* (beginning on p. 148). Tiffany suggests that this conversation should be very straightforward as we pray for God to naturally open doors to new relationships.

Here's a simple icebreaker for you to try—

“Could we have lunch, or take a walk together? I would love to get to know you!”

Yes, it's that easy. And yes, it's that hard. And yes, it might feel weird—but you only have to have a clumsy conversation with a new friend one time. Your second and third and thirtieth conversations will be about your new running shoes, where you're meeting for dinner, and her mother's doctor appointment. “Not everyone will want to take you under their wing,” says Amy, “but if you show interest and become involved in their lives, most people really want to build bridges. If you have built relationships, you can lead with your heart and usually there's a lot of grace.”

“Seek God and do what He puts right in front of you,” she suggests. “For some people, that will mean running for office. For others, it will mean taking a meal to a neighbor on a hard day. For others, it will mean going to a Bible study at a predominantly Black church.”

That's what Amy did when she felt God nudging her to learn from her friend Tammy's excellent Bible teaching at her predominantly Black church in North Carolina. Tammy called her on the drive home afterwards to ask, “So, how was it?”

“I have to tell you, I was a little nervous,” Amy replied. “When I opened the door, I didn't know whether people would want me or welcome me.”

“Yes, I know,” said Tammy. “That's how I feel every time I walk into a room.”

This experience gave Amy more empathy than any course or conversation. “I heard God telling me, ‘Amy, make yourself the minority every chance you get,’” she recalls. “When I went back for the second year, I could see the look on people's faces as they thought, ‘Oh! She came back!’ Everyone had always been very nice to me, but suddenly I had friends. One woman told me, ‘White people invite us to their churches all the time, but you're the only one who's ever come to ours.’”

A time to speak

Amy teaches that when we've learned to listen, leveraged our feelings, and determined our “do”, we are able to voice our heart. “Putting this last means we don't speak for a long time! We're having lots of conversations, but mostly we are listening,” Amy said. “We need to go through these steps to earn the right to speak to people. When we've listened for a while, we can enter conversations with more discernment and understanding. We've built trust, respect, and love so that people can receive our words from us.”

Without going through this important process, we typically respond with one of these three extremes:

1. **HURL** We spout out whatever's on the tip of our tongues without any thought or reason.



2. **HIDE** We take cover behind socially accepted expressions. “It doesn’t really count when you post a black square on Facebook in solidarity or share an article,” Amy cautions, “if it’s not accompanied by heart change.”
3. **HUSH** “We’re so afraid to say the wrong thing, we say nothing at all,” she sympathizes.

Social media can be a powerful place to express yourself—at the right time, in the right way. “Don’t say something just because you feel pressured; that’s dangerous territory,” Amy said. Instead, use personal conversations as well as bigger platforms to share your real-life experiences, compassionate beliefs, and spiritual revelations.

No matter the melatonin reflected at us in the mirror, loving our neighbor is still the first step toward racial peace and social justice in every neighborhood.



Politics: The great divide

If you turn right out of my driveway and drive past Alpine Lake to the ghost town of St. Elmo, cross the Chalk Creek and head up Tin Cup Pass, about 15 bumpy miles from my house you’ll reach the Continental Divide—a line of high peaks that stretches from the Bering Strait in Alaska all the way to the Straits of Magellan at the southern tip of South America. If you stand on the Continental Divide Trail and spit to the west, your DNA will end up in the Pacific Ocean; spit to the east, and you’ll end up in the Atlantic. It’s a pretty cool place to spit. There’s a divide in our country that seems as just as high, and it’s also been a bumpy ride. With a sliver of votes separating our presidential candidates and the Senate neatly split, we could optimistically say our nation is fairly united. But flick through the news stations or scroll through your social media, and you’ll probably feel like spitting. Our screens tell us what to be afraid of and why we should be indignantly angry all the time. The gap is growing in our views on immigration, gun laws, global warming, healthcare, education, police, taxes, abortion, foreign trade, faith, science—oh, and don’t forget race.

Here’s a relevant Biblical promise no one wants to memorize or put on a coffee mug:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, *unappeasable*, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good... 2 Timothy 3:1-3 (ESV, emphasis added)

This word “unappeasable” appears only here in the New Testament, and it means *irreconcilable, with nothing mutually agreed upon, unable to be persuaded to enter into a treaty*. This may be the clearest sign of the second coming I’ve ever seen.

We’ve lost the ability to have a civil discussion about differing opinions, so our culture is dissolving into a puddle of hostility. There’s even a divide within the church, as #EvangelicalsForTrump and #BelieversForBiden hashed it out. Thankfully, pastor and author Kevin Thompson has figured out for us how Christians should cast our votes:

Here is how a Christian should vote: having studied the issues as best they can, without arrogance in believing their way is the only way, and in faith, trusting God with the results. This means two Christians can vote in completely opposite ways and be in total obedience to God. It means there is not only one way for a Christian to vote. It demands humility in understanding our human frailty, knowing we could be wrong. It creates compassion toward

others no matter how they vote or if they vote. It results in unity because we care more for the well-being of others than our political viewpoint. Faith should influence how we vote, but it should not influence us all to vote the same way. As faith mixes with our experience, passion, and concern, good Christian people will vote in opposite ways about very important issues.

When we first figure out how to get along inside our churches, we can gain influence in the world outside our doors. Notably absent of instructions for agnostics, Scripture speaks bluntly to believers:

Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone. Titus 3:1-2

Ouch. Or am I the only one who finds this difficult?

One key question to understand your neighbor

Pandemics change everything, and many families are yearning for open spaces to live, work, worship, and play amid COVID-19. Your neighborhood is going to change over the next couple of years. Rental apartment inventory is up 96% in San Francisco and 26% in New York City as people leave the city for less-dense suburban areas, and moving companies report that moves out of major cities are up 50%. The New York Times reports home sales in suburban counties outside New York City were up 44% in July 2020 over the previous year, with homes receiving multiple offers over the asking price.

It remains to be seen if the move from closely-packed metros to wide open spaces is a permanent or temporary shift, but it's already begun. This shift will affect home prices and the real estate market... and who lives next door to you. If you're not packing up your own family, you'll probably be watching new neighbors unload their moving truck.

Migration means more than finding new doctors and new schools and meeting new coworkers. It's more than taste-testing your new favorite barbeque, figuring out the quickest way across town, and checking out churches even if they're online. Moving to a new community also means figuring out how people think and dipping your toe the frigid pool of politics, understanding how your views will be received, whether your initiatives will pass, and how near or far your neighbors sit across the aisle.

How will we get to know and get along with our neighbors? This has been an issue since Old Testament times and isn't going away anytime soon. Even if you don't get new neighbors, you've probably experienced angst with your old ones.

Geography affects philosophy, and where we live impacts how we think. So, here's one surprising question that will help you understand where your neighbor is coming from, both literally and figuratively:

"Have you ever been cow tipping?"

There's nothing magical about cows and I certainly don't recommend trying to tip one, but the purpose of this peculiar question is to understand your neighbor's perspective. See, our political ideology and personal leanings are greatly impacted by the view off our front porch. Are you used to seeing cows, pastures, open roads, and widely scattered rural communities? Or have you been surrounded by taxicabs, skyscrapers, highways, and densely populated cities?

Surely you noticed that the voting maps we await with bated breath every election night are bright blue around big cities and deep red in rural areas. Republicans, on average, live 20 miles from a city center, while independents are 17 miles away, and Democrats only 12 miles. In the 2012 presidential election, 98% of the most

densely populated U.S. counties voted Democrat while 98% of the least dense counties voted Republican. No matter which party you profess, the type of community you live in is a predictor of your views about hot topics like abortion, the role of government, immigration, same sex marriage, and race.

Who is your neighbor? Type your zip code into this mapping software to explore the demographic and lifestyle trends of your community as well as population density.

As we spread out from cities, the number of neighbors seems to influence our vote as well as our view: Democrats typically live side by side with 1,197 neighbors per square mile; independents have 738 neighbors per square mile; and Republicans are more spread out with 585 neighbors per square mile. The population density in my home zip code in rural Colorado is a sparse 6 people per square mile (we probably have more deer than people) while my daughter shares space in the Denver suburbs with 2,284 people per square mile. Sometimes our different experiences and perspectives feel like we're living on different planets.

Rural roots lead to less reliance on government entities for daily needs. Country folk take their trash to the dump, not the curb, and pump their own water. Guns are tools of survival and a fun hobby. Rural fire departments are volunteer, and so are the zucchinis in your garden. Your next-door neighbor will reach you faster than the 911 dispatch, so you'd better have their number on speed dial, too.

In the city, certain things come easier—fresh sushi, street sweepers, ride shares and subways. City folk recycle trash and their fluoridated water comes from a treatment plant. Guns are weapons of destruction that strike fear. There's less need for large cars and lawnmowers, but more need for public services to help the homeless and poor that are often encountered.

Your front porch view influences your worldview. As consultant Shannon Welch points out, "Neither are wrong. Their needs and perspective are just vastly different." As we get to know our neighbor, questions about their history may help us understand their heart. The keywords aren't left or right, Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative—they are humility and understanding, compassion and concern, esteem and honor. Treating others with gentleness and respect is simple—not easy, but simple.



It's Not All Bad

God still reigns in this decade. He is still sovereign, and He's not slapping His head saying, "Wow, I didn't see 2020 coming!" Most wonderful of all, He is still keeping His promises—especially this one:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 (ESV)

In the AMY translation of this verse (that's the one I make up in my own head), God causes everything to turn out good for me—you know, the way I want it, when I want it. Instead, I see that my job is to respond to God's call by loving Him, let Him define what's good, and trust Him to determine His purpose. My friend Katherine used the pressure that began in 2020 to reprioritize several areas of her life.

Though quarantine and 2020 have been terrible for so many people, God has really blessed me and used the time to help me heal and learn to rest. I've been running myself ragged for years. I've ruined family ties and friendships, and my relationship with God. All hell broke

loose in my life last year and I was just so broken. I thought I knew what faith was. I was looking for a home and family; just somewhere to belong. Quarantine forced me to stay home and be with God. So much has happened for my better. Now I have a full house, multiple Godly friendships with people who live close. I've had steady work and increased pay. I found a home church, I'm teaching Sunday School and learning so much through it. I am involved in recovery ministry and God is restoring all that was lost. I just have so much joy and peace no matter what happens in the world. All is well.

All is well. If we press into the pain this season has wrought, we can find peace.

- The pandemic forces us to find new and creative ways to care for our neighbor. Coronavirus makes our hearts cry out for healing and comfort that can only come from our Father's hand.
- The protests reveal any hidden prejudice and pry open our hearts to sincerely love our brothers and sisters. True reconciliation is possible through Christ.
- If we take the time to understand different political perspectives, we can see our neighbor with compassion. Unity does not demand conformity, only kindness.

The ground rules for loving our neighbor haven't changed in 2,000 years, even though 2020 felt like the beginning of a new era. This remarkable year was a tool in God's hand to shape us for the years ahead, and for that we must be grateful.



Sign up for email notifications at www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com to receive our in-depth interview with Tiffany Edwards of ONE CHURCH plus regular tips and tools to love your neighbor—without ever being weird, of course.

Next Best Steps



1. Reflect upon how you have been impacted in these areas and circle the appropriate response (circle more than one if applicable), then calculate your Coronavirus Quiz score. Take the quiz online at www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com/coronavirus-quiz.

PERSONAL LOSS				
1	2	3	4	5
No one I know personally died from the virus	My community had relatively few deaths	My community was heavily impacted	An acquaintance passed away	I lost a very close family member or friend

HEALTH AND WELLNESS				
1	2	3	4	5
I have not been affected	I may have had the virus, I'm not sure	I am at high risk for getting sick	I had a mild case of COVID-19	I was very sick with coronavirus

COMMUNITY				
1	2	3	4	5
I have had ample contact with people	I have been inconvenienced but am dealing with it	I have been bored and lonely	I've missed major life events that cannot be repeated	I was not able to be with a loved one in their final days

ECONOMIC IMPACT				
1	2	3	4	5
I have actually prospered during this time	This made no difference in my daily finances	I suffered a setback but will be ok	I couldn't get by without assistance	I don't know if I will ever recover financially

VOCATION				
1	2	3	4	5
I do not work or was not affected	I worked extra at my essential job	I lost my job temporarily	My spouse lost their job	I lost my job permanently

MENTAL HEALTH				
1	2	3	4	5
I am closer to God than ever	I am learning new ways to cope	I'm seeking answers and need help	I am anxious, angry, and afraid	I have or had suicidal thoughts*

*FOR HELP 24/7, PLEASE CALL THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE AT 800-273-8255.

TOTAL CORONAVIRUS QUIZ SCORE: _____

2. Envision your neighbors' homes, and try to answer these questions for the people who live closest to you. How has their experience been the same or different from yours?
3. What are your spiritual gifts? You can take a test online or print a copy at www.spiritualgiftstest.com, or ask a few people close to you to help identify your spiritual gifts. Pray for God to reveal His gifts to you—and ask how you can use them at this time in your neighborhood.
4. How are your neighbors being impacted by the color of their skin, positively and negatively?
5. What's the racial climate in your community? Is there acceptance and love, or judgment and prejudice? What steps have you taken personally in this arena?
6. Does the diversity of your relationships reflect your community? Commit to one step you will take to deepen an honest relationship with someone who looks different than you.

	Everyone looks just like me	Few different races	Many different races	I am the minority
My neighborhood				
My workplace				
My church				
My children's school				
My social media				
My community				

7. Visit www.amycarroll.org/race-education-resources and choose one book, podcast, movie, or class to grow in understanding and be part of the solution to race in America.
8. Visit <https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/tapestry-segmentation/zip-lookup> and research the population density of these areas. How has your front porch view shaped your worldview?

	Population density per square mile		Population density per square mile
My current home		My childhood home	
Where I went to college		Where I lived the longest	
Spouse's childhood home		Where my children live	

9. What informs your political opinion? Do you listen to only agreeable voices, or are you able to hear opposing viewpoints with an open mind? Subscribe to a service such as [The Factual](#), [All Sides](#), or [1440](#) that rates and ranks news stories based on author's expertise, media bias, and quality of sources cited.
10. When discussing policy or politics, what emotions do you experience? Are you able to have a civil dialog with people who believe differently than you? Describe how the last such conversation went. What was the impact on this personal relationship after a political discussion?
11. Name three good things that happened to you in 2020-22. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for God's goodness and faithfulness during such a trying time, committing to trust Him in 2022 and beyond.