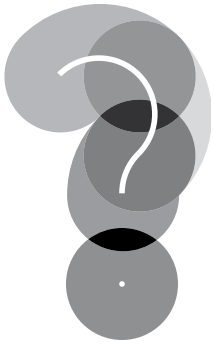
WHAT IS *LOVE GOD, NEIGHBOR, ENEMY* ABOUT?



Our homes and families are, ideally, our soft places to land in a world that can be unkind at times. In creating households in which our families can flourish, we strive to create places where children and adults alike can feel confident that they will receive love and be cared for. From this place of receiving love and nurture, we are able to go into the world to share God's love with those that we meet. While this is easy in theory, sometimes it is more complex in practice. Not every person is easy to love, and sometimes offering love feels uncomfortable or even counterintuitive, such as with those we may view (and who may view us!) as enemies. This resource seeks to offer ideas, practices, and conversation starters for households to begin to take this practice out of the church building and into the world.

FRIENDSHIP BREAD

Supplies: internet-connected device, baking ingredients and kitchen supplies as listed on website

Go to bit.ly/FMBreadStarter and read about how to create a starter for Amish friendship bread. Together, make and tend to a batch of starter, and when it is ready, choose three people to share a bag of starter with. As an extra challenge, consider sharing one with someone from church, one with someone from your neighborhood, and one with someone that you don't know very well yet.

FOOT-CARE BAGS

Supplies: zip-lock plastic bags and new foot care supplies such as warm socks, toe warmers, nail clippers or files, lotion, soap, washcloths, bandages, and moleskin

Many ordinary items that we take for granted, such as warm socks and personal care items, can be especially helpful to individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Contact a local homeless shelter or food pantry to see if they would have a need for foot-care items. As a family, create bags with some of the most needed items to bring to the social service agency for distribution to their guests.

MEDALS OF COURAGE

Supplies: a simple object to serve as a "medal of courage," either crafted by family members, purchased, or something repurposed

Acknowledge the little things that take a lot of courage by having a family *medal* that can be passed around to celebrate achievements of all family members, including adult members. Begin with one person presenting the medal to someone in the family as a way of lifting up the recipient's particular everyday act of courage. After that, the person who currently has the medal is invited to award it to a new family member. Consider doing this as part of breakfast, dinner, or another time that the family is all together. Do it frequently enough that family members can regularly lift up small acts of courage in daily living.

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

Supplies: internet-connected device

Presbyterian pastor and beloved television personality Fred Rogers brought that question into our living rooms through our televisions at the end of the last century, and Daniel Tiger continues to bring this question to the lives of preschoolers today (see www.pbskids.org/daniel). Explore the theme of being neighbors using resources found at bit.ly/FMMrRogersResources, such as worship ideas, a hymn, activities, peace cards, a coloring page, and more.

LENTEN PRAYERS OF LOVE

Supplies: forty small sheets of white paper; six sheets of colored paper; pens or markers; a box, basket, or jar to hold paper slips

During the season of Lent, use this activity as a Lenten discipline. Divide the forty small sheets of white paper equally among family members. On one half of the sheets, ask each person to write the names (one name per sheet) of people they consider neighbors or part of their community: classmates, neighbors, coworkers, teammates, and so forth. On the other half, have them write the names of people whom they find hard to love: people they have conflict with,

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public figures whose behavior has been disappointing, people who have acted unkindly toward them, and so forth. Together, brainstorm different names of God, and write one name for God on each of the six sheets of colored paper. Fold all the sheets of paper and put them in a box, basket, or jar. Each day of Lent, at the beginning of the day (or the night before) choose a sheet of paper from the jar (saving the colored sheets for Sundays) and post it in a place visible to all. Ask each member of your family to say a prayer for the person named. On Sundays, try to use the chosen name for God in church, and in any family prayers such as mealtime blessings or bedtime prayers.

KNOWING YOUR NEIGHBORS

How well does your family know your neighbors? For some, neighbors are almost like a second family; for others, they are almost strangers. Think about the people who live around you, and come up with ways to connect more with the people who live near you. This could include something simple such as dropping off a homemade treat or something bigger such as planning a block party.

STORYTIME

Read aloud or watch the YouTube video of one or more of these stories about loving God, neighbor, and enemy:

- *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson (Chronicle Books, 2000) or YouTube video "Enemy Pie—Reading Rainbow" (bit.ly/FMEnemyPie, 7:29)
- *Who Is My Neighbor?* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Flyaway Books, 2019) or YouTube video "Who Is My Neighbor?" (bit.ly/FMNeighbor, 8:10)
- *What Will I Do with My Love Today?* by Kristin Chenoweth (Thomas Nelson, 2022) or YouTube video "What Will I Do with My Love Today Reading" (bit.ly/FMLoveToday, 6:09)

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

- The Golden Rule instructs us to "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). As a family discuss this, considering what is easy in this simple command and also what is hard. It has also been argued that a better rule is to treat others as *they* would like to be treated. How might this reframing change how we act? How could considering both of these ideas help us to love God, neighbor, and enemy better?
- The title of this unit is *Love God, Neighbor, Enemy*, which is something that most everyone can agree is an important part of being a Christian. Discuss as a family how you think about this when it is defined as a practice of our faith rather than simply a nice thing to do.
- We often talk about how much God loves us, but perhaps not so much about how we can love God and show our love for God. Together, discuss what loving God looks like.
- The word *enemy* is uncomfortable. As Christians, we don't want to think of anyone as our enemy! Despite this discomfort, the idea is real, and Jesus specifically uses this term in Scripture. Explore thoughts on the word *enemy* as a family, and discuss what that label means for difficult relationships.

PRAYER

Loving God, our hearts are so full of the love you have for us. May that love give us courage and motivation to go into the world to share that love and to tell your story. Amen.

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