

Read also Nehemiah 5:1-15. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

We say around here, “Neighbors Standing Hand in Hand.” It was our logo for Community in Unity. It is on our tee-shirt. We promote being a good neighbor; loving your neighbor.

We did not come up with this on our own. God said it.

- There’s the ten commandments:
 - You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16-17).
- Leviticus gets even more specific:
 - When any of you sin ... by deceiving a neighbor in a matter of a deposit or a pledge, or by robbery, or if you have defrauded a neighbor, you need to restore it and confess it to the Lord, and you will be forgiven. (6:2-7)
 - You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. (19:15)
 - You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor. (19:16)
 - You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (19:18)

Perhaps you do not feel that God has prepared you for your neighbors! However, God persists in saying a sin against the neighbor is a sin against God. Deuteronomy continues this theme:

- You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, or provisions, or on anything that is lent, (23:19)
- If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns, . . . do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,” and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.” (15:7-11)

Is God starting to step on your toes?

Wouldn’t life be easier if we could ignore God on this one by ignoring our neighbors, especially the irritating ones?

But distressed neighbors are rarely silent. Today, just as in Nehemiah’s time, disgruntled neighbors must be heard. And Nehemiah listened. Nehemiah understood that there is power in caring—thus he enforced those laws about helping one another.

Amazingly, the people promised to do what Nehemiah said. They said, “Amen,” and praised the Lord. And they did what he said.

This attitude carried over to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Let’s hear it. READ 1 Thes. 2:1-12

These men had been in the less-than-hospitable town of Philippi, they were treated horribly, yet they did not let that experience of public humiliation color their view as they entered the next town, Thessalonica. How did they do it?

By focusing on their message,

1. They considered it a privilege to carry the gospel for God.
2. They wanted to do it in such a way that they would be found worthy.
3. They made up their minds not to be a burden to the people.
4. They approached people with gentleness.
5. They didn’t just come to talk about Jesus; *they shared themselves*.

What if we, as ordinary Christians, approached our neighbors the same way?

Remember Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood? In his book *Important Things to Remember*, Fred Rogers said, “I hope you’re proud of yourself for the times you’ve said “yes,” when all it meant was extra work for you and was seemingly helpful only to someone else.”

Watch this video from a 1997 acceptance speech in which he admonishes his colleagues—he wants Hollywood to produce shows promoting love for neighbor. (VIDEO at 3:08-4:08¹)

He admonishes us, too. “Life isn’t cheap. Show and tell what the good in life is all about. Bring courage to those you encounter each day.” Mister Rogers, a Presbyterian minister, allowed himself to love people.

You might be just the person who brings out the best in someone each day because you have the courage to inspire someone to love others.

The Thessalonica church was made up of people who formerly were enemies. Jews and Gentiles could not have been more opposite in beliefs but now they were striving to come together around the message of God.

The challenge for unity among people holding differing beliefs meets every generation. Let’s look back to our nation’s early years. In the summer of 1787, delegates assembled in Philadelphia to write a new constitution. Delegates included George Washington, Ben Franklin, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton—and of course many we don’t know.

At that time there were two parties—the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. (Do you think they were friends?!) They knew disagreement would be great because this form of government had

¹ Fred Rogers Inducted into the TV Hall of Fame, accessed June 7, 2017. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcNxY4TudXo>, minutes shown 3:08-4:08.

never been undertaken before. The two parties were split over many issues and dissolution threatened them often.

The delegates took some actions to diminish the differences. First, they swore themselves to secrecy to block all media gossip, even shutting all the windows and drapes. They did not want the process to be ambushed by negative press. Secondly, they went so far as to agree to withhold their records until after all delegates had died. They wanted to be known as men of honor.

And yet the process was hard and weeks turned into months as they debated.

One day Benjamin Franklin, the oldest man at 81, rose to his feet. Acknowledging that human understanding is imperfect, he reminded them that they prayed daily in that hall all during the Revolutionary War; prayers that were graciously answered. He urged them to seek the “Powerful Friend”—to seek their God, who had brought them to victory thus far.

That speech was the turning point of the Convention. Ben Franklin’s words altered the atmosphere as the delegates realized God’s supervision was essential to their success, to their common goal as good neighbors.

Their actions were perhaps inspired by Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Thessalonica.

The day came for the most crucial vote of the convention, one which could halt the entire process. There were two delegates from Maryland, each on a different political “side” thus with each vote, they canceled out the other. On that day, just prior to the vote call, one of those delegates, named Daniel Jenifer, a man who had perfect attendance at the entire convention, got up, strolled out of the State House, and took a walk. He returned right after the tally was taken. He had left just long enough for Luther Martin, the other delegate from Maryland, to control Maryland’s vote on equal representation for every state in the upper house of the legislature.

Daniel Jenifer knew that had the other party not won the vote, the convention would have ended in disagreement, and if they had quit, there would have been no United States. Even though he was on the side against this issue, he deliberately threw the result the other way to save the convention.

He wanted to deliver a larger victory for his country.

Can you imagine what it would be like in 2017 if this generation—if we would assume that attitude?

Daniel Jenifer’s short walk was an act of love which changed the course of history.

What is your attitude? Do you go the extra mile for your neighbor? If so, you can change the world. That’s what Paul, Silas, and Timothy did. They brought enemies together. They did it simply by loving their neighbor and giving of themselves.

Do you consider it a privilege that God asks you to carry the gospel?
Do you want to do it in such a way that you are found worthy?

Have you made up your mind not to be a burden to people?
Do you approach people with respect and gentleness?

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” “Give to your neighbor,” God persistently says, as he steps on our toes. But if you do it, a whole new world will open up and you will find yourself in the midst of new unexpected miracles. AMEN