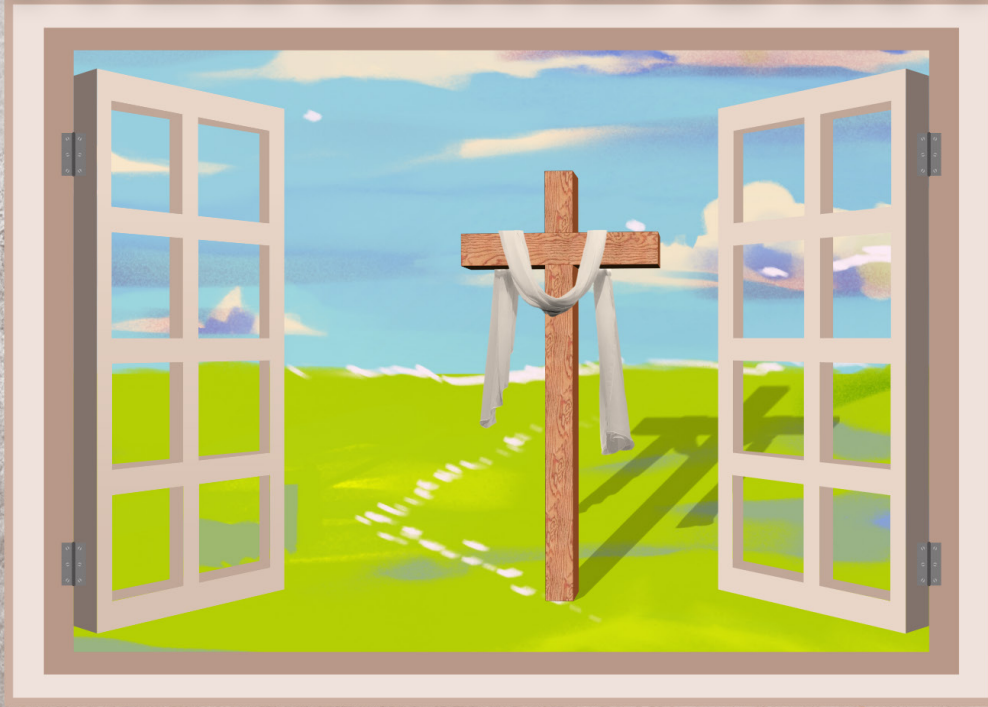


Who is My **NEIGHBOR?**



**Lent
2024**



NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Linked-In Learning • Lent 2024

Study Guide

NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Ways to Use this Study Guide

If you are leading or participating in a small group:

- * Begin by reading the introduction for its important orientation to the theme for this study.
- * Leaders of small groups can prepare by reading the text in advance as well as looking over the discussion plan to see how it will fit your group and the events of the day.
- * Participants can best prepare for each meeting by reading the assigned text in advance at least once. They can also read the material that will guide the discussion, although this is not necessary to enter into the discussion.

If you are unable to attend a small group:

- * Use this guide each week to prepare to hear the sermon during the week on the Nassau Church website or in worship on Sunday.
- * Read the text and discuss the questions together as a family or couple.
- * Gather three or four friends on Zoom to talk about *Who Is My Neighbor?* using this guide.
- * Reflect on the text and discussion questions as a Lenten practice or discipline.

However and whenever you enter into this study, bring your own questions as you grapple with this material and answers to the question, "*Who is my neighbor?*" today. May your faith increase even as you find courage to be a good neighbor in these stories from the Bible.

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Introduction to the Small Groups Plan

In her book, *Short Stories by Jesus: the Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, Amy-Jill Levine writes on page 1, “The Gospel writers, in their wisdom, left most of the parables as open narratives in order to invite us into engagement with them.” That is precisely what we are doing in this Lenten Linked-in Series. We will be exploring the answer Jesus gave when the lawyer or legal expert asked him, “But who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Through this exploration in worship, adult education, and small groups, we will examine our understanding of neighbor as a congregation and as individual disciples of Jesus the Christ.

We begin with the foundational New Testament story told by Jesus in answer to the question, “*Who is my neighbor?*” In the remaining weeks during Lent our attention will be on stories from the Gospel of Luke and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, both attributed to Luke. Through these five stories—the Gerasene demoniac, the parables of loss, the Ethiopian eunuch, Ananias and Sapphira, and the widow of Nain—we will discover how Jesus and the early church engaged with their neighbors.

Finally, all this study and conversation is for naught unless it leads us to ask how we are neighbors in our communities today. May this engagement with these texts deepen your experience of the Season of Lent and strengthen your commitment to a life of discipleship as you seek to be a good neighbor.

For those participating remotely Adult education recordings will be available on the website by Mondays at noon (<https://nassauchurch.org/2024/02/ae-lent/>) and worship services are livestreamed on Sundays at 9:15 AM (Eastern), available for replay by 11:00 AM (<https://nassauchurch.org/worship/livestream-worship/>)



WEEK ONE

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25–37

This Lenten Linked-in Series begins with a parable so influential that the phrase “good Samaritan” is common even amongst folks who do not know this story. This famous parable is prompted by the question guiding this series, “*Who is my neighbor?*” While we may doubt the sincerity of the lawyer broaching this question, it is nonetheless a question that ought to guide faith day-by-day. As the stories of our neighbors near and far are ever more accessible via travel, migration, and the Internet, whose stories do we trust? Last, we will explore the ethical import of Jesus’ call “to go and do likewise”. How exactly are we called to imitate the Samaritan traveler?

Pray Open with prayer or pray after the first activity.

Transition from everyday life to the small group setting Invite the participants to introduce themselves and answer one of the questions on page 24 or your own.

If there are a number of people who don’t know each other in your group, you might choose a more general question to begin to build trust in this group setting.

Linking with adult education and the sermon Each week as you listen to the adult education presentation and the sermon keep in mind these two questions:

- * How did the adult education presentation and the sermon work together?
- * What new thoughts came to mind as you listened to these interpretations?

Guidelines for Small Groups Review the “Group Covenant”, even if only one member is new to your group. Make any comments particular to your group, such as “I like to start promptly and end on the agreed time” or “I will have tea ready for you each week” or “Please let me know if you will not be here.”

The focus for the Lent 2024 Linked-in Small Groups Ask for a volunteer to read Luke 10:25–29, where the title for this series is found. The Jewish legal expert quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. The two verses quoted by the legal expert are in separate parts of the Old Testament. The verse from Deuteronomy is the first of a long section of rules and laws Moses speaks to the Israelites before he dies and they cross into the Promised Land. The Leviticus verse is preceded in chapter 19 by a host of edicts about how to treat others. Ask:

- * How do the two verses complement each other?
- * Why do you think the Jewish legal expert focuses on the verse from Leviticus in his question to Jesus?
- * Note that the stories from Luke and Acts in these weeks will give us clues about how to answer that question for ourselves today.

The good Samaritan Ask for someone else to read Luke 10:30–37. Then have another person read the same verses from a different translation. If it was read from the NRSV the first time, read it the second time from the CEB or *The Message*. Hearing a familiar passage in a slightly different translation can open the story to us in new ways.

Discuss the parable of the Samaritan with these questions:

- * Recall a time when a neighbor cared for you. How did it feel?
- * What about the parable might be surprising to the Jewish legal expert?
- * What do you think Jesus means when he asks the legal expert to “go and do likewise”?

Being the good neighbor If you have time, have someone read Luke 10:30–37 from any translation again. Ask the group to sit in silence and think about this question for a moment:

- * We often read this parable and the focus is on *being* a good neighbor. But who is my neighbor, based on this parable?

After a discussion of the question above, ask:

- * What do you think Jesus means when he asks us to be good neighbors?
- * In what ways does the story of the Good Samaritan inspire you to care for your neighbors?

If you are running out of time, invite the group to think about the last question above and include their responses in the next session.

Close with prayer Invite prayer requests for neighbors near and far. Incorporate these requests into a closing prayer, or be in an attitude of prayer as they are named and close with a sentence prayer, such as “All these requests we give to you, God, as we depart and leave this group of your people. Amen.”



WEEK TWO

The Gerasene Demoniac

Luke 8:26–39

In Week 2, our attention moves from a story Jesus told in response to a question from a Jewish legal expert to an incident early in Jesus' ministry. Crossing a lake, Jesus finds himself in an unfamiliar place and context. In this Gentile area, Jesus encounters a man teeming with demonic forces and heals him. This exorcised man seeks to follow Jesus and yet he exhorts the erstwhile demoniac to stay. As we hear this story, we will continue to ask, "*Who is my neighbor?*"

Pray Open with prayer or pray after the first activity.

Transition from everyday life to the small group setting Invite the participants to introduce themselves and answer one of the questions on page 24 or your own.

Review Ask for any comments or reflections on the previous story of the Samaritan who was a loving neighbor.

- * How did the adult education presentation and the sermon work together?
- * What new thoughts came to mind as you listened to these interpretations?

If you encouraged the group to reflect on a question from Week 1 during the week, ask for their responses now.

The Gerasene demoniac Ask for someone to read Luke 8:26–39. Then have someone else read it from a different translation. If it was read from the NRSV the first time, read it the second time from the CEB or *The Message*. Hearing a familiar passage in a slightly different translation can open the story to us in new ways.

Discuss the story of the Gerasene demoniac with these questions:

- * On the way to the land of the Gerasenes, a violent storm came up on the lake and Jesus calmed the winds and waters. Having just experienced this, how do you think the disciples reacted to this exorcism?
- * Why do you think the local people were afraid after Jesus exorcised the demons?
- * How do you understand the Gospel stories about demons and possession?

Being the good neighbor If you have time, have someone read Luke 8:26–39 from any translation again. Ask the group to listen with this question in mind:

- * Who is the neighbor in this story?

Continue the conversation with these questions:

- * Who corresponds to that person(s) in our society today?
- * Name some places where you find being a neighbor to be a particular challenge for you.

If you are running out of time, and you want to allow time for the closing prayer, have the group think silently about the last question above. Or ask them to consider it during the week ahead.

Close with prayer Invite prayer requests for neighbors near and far, especially those who have been shut out or shunned by our society. Include these people or groups of people in the closing prayer, or enter into prayer and ask for such people to be named, closing with a sentence prayer, such as “Creator God, give us the courage to be neighbors to people that others ignore or shun. Amen.”



WEEK THREE

The Parables of Loss

Luke 15:1-32

The three parables in Luke 15 (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son) are vivid accounts of the gospel in narrative form. In these stories of loss, disappointment, and celebration, we encounter what it means for God to search us all out. And in God's searching, we also learn that God's sense of "we" is always more expansive than we had previously known. In the first two stories, the neighbors are included in the celebration. In the third story, a great feast is held, but the neighbors are not mentioned as such. In answering the question, "*Who is my neighbor?*", who are the neighbors in this trio of parables?

Pray Open with a brief prayer to gather the group together, or pray after the next activity.

Transition from everyday life to the small group setting Invite the participants to introduce themselves and answer one of the questions on page 24 or your own.

Review Ask for any comments or questions about the previous story, the Gerasene demoniac.

- * How did the adult education presentation and the sermon work together?
- * What new thoughts came to mind as you listened to these interpretations?

Ask for comments now if you assigned a question from the previous week for their reflection.

The parables of loss Ask a volunteer to read Luke 15:1–2. When Jesus tells a story or performs an act of healing, knowing where it took place and who was present can be helpful. Ask:

- * Who are the people listening to Jesus teach?
- * How would each group be approaching him?
- * Who are the “sinners” the religious people are talking about?

Ask a volunteer to read Luke 15:3–10. Ask someone else to read it from a different translation. A Bible app on someone’s phone or tablet can provide translations not otherwise available. Reflect on these two stories with these questions:

- * What is common to these two parables?
- * In what ways are they different?

Ask volunteers to read Luke 15:11–32 from both translations used above. Ask:

- * In this story of the prodigal or the lost son, who is lost and needs to be found?
- * How is this parable connected to the previous parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin?
- * How is it different?
- * Which of the three parables resonate with you the most? Why?

Being the good neighbor In the story of the lost coin and the lost sheep, neighbors gather to celebrate the find. One might assume that neighbors also celebrated with the family of the returning son.

Ask:

- * What do we learn about being a good neighbor from these stories?
- * What do we learn about God in these stories?
- * What image of being a good neighbor will you take for yourself as a result of this consideration of the parables of loss?

If time is running short, invite the participants to use the last question as a focus of their thinking or meditation during the coming week.

Close with prayer Invite prayer requests for neighbors near and far, especially those who have lost their way and are often ignored. Include these people or groups of people in the closing prayer, or enter into prayer and ask for such people to be named, closing with a sentence prayer, such as “God of strength, give us the courage to be neighbors to others. Everyone. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

PRAYERS



WEEK FOUR

An Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40

This week we turn to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles for the first of two stories about neighbors. This gives us an opportunity to think about being a good neighbor in the context of the early church. In this story we meet one of the most extraordinary characters in the Book of Acts. After a long journey to Jerusalem and a complicated life experience with both power and powerlessness, the eunuch asks for help from a stranger, eventually concluding in the joyful waters of baptism. How did the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip become neighbors one to another in the middle of nowhere?

Pray Open with a brief prayer to gather the group together, or pray after the next activity.

Transition from everyday life to the small group setting Invite the participants to introduce themselves and answer one of the questions on page 25 or your own.

Review Ask for any comments or questions about the previous story, the parables of loss.

- * What in the sermon challenged your thoughts on these parables?
- * How did the photographs by Ned Walthall or his presentation expand your interpretation of these parables?

Ask for comments if you assigned a question for reflection during the week.

The story of an Ethiopian eunuch Note that we have moved to the Book of Acts and for two weeks will consider stories of the early church in our quest to determine what it means to be a good neighbor and identifying our neighbor.

Ask a volunteer to read Acts 8:26–40. Then ask for someone else to read it from a different translation. Discuss this story, asking:

- * What details of this story grabbed your attention?
- * After reading the information about eunuchs below, ask: What can you imagine about the life of this eunuch from Ethiopia? What more would you like to know?
- * Refer to verse 34 and ask: What do you think Philip said in response to the eunuch's pressing question about whom was Isaiah prophesying?
- * How do you interpret this story as one that teaches about neighbors?

Being the good neighbor The encounter of the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip the evangelist is a brief one and apparently the two men never saw each other again.

- * When have you encountered a neighbor in a place that felt like the middle of nowhere?
- * What opportunities do we have for one-time encounters like this to be a good neighbor?
- * What will you take from this story about being a good neighbor?

Close with prayer Invite prayer requests for neighbors, especially near and far. Include these people or groups of people in the closing prayer, or enter into prayer and ask for such people to be named, closing with a sentence prayer, such as “Loving God, give us the courage to be neighbors to strangers, wherever we meet them. Amen.”

Information about eunuchs As a castrated male, a eunuch was unable to participate fully in temple worship and Israel’s covenant community (Lev. 21:18–20; Deut. 23:1). Coming from Ethiopia, he was a foreigner who was an official in a pagan country. Even though he was attracted to Israel’s God and moral teachings, he could not convert to Judaism. [Based on information in the *CEB Study Bible* and the *Discipleship Study Bible (NRSV)*]



WEEK FIVE

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 5:1-11

In this terrifying story, we come face to face with the high stakes of life lived together. It is a story of the early church that is rarely the subject of sermons (even during stewardship campaigns) and is certainly not fodder for a church school lesson for children. At first take, this story appears to be about greed and selfishness. But rather than a story interested in guilt or shame about our own attachments to our possessions, what if this story points to the great possibilities and challenging demands of a community that cares for the needs of their neighbors?

Pray Open with a brief prayer to gather the group together, or pray after the next activity.

Transition from everyday life to the small group setting Invite the participants to introduce themselves and answer one of the questions on page 25 or your own.

Review Ask for any comments or questions about the previous story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

- * How did the adult education presentation and the sermon work together?
- * What new thoughts came to mind as you listened to these interpretations?

Ask for comments if you had the group reflect on a question from the previous week.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira Invite a volunteer to read Acts 5:1–11, followed by someone else reading it from a different translation. *The Message* would be a good second reading. Ask:

- * Do you recall reading or hearing this story before? In what context?
- * Where do you think Ananias and Sapphira went wrong in this story?
- * What do you imagine happened in the early church as suggested in v. 11?
- * What do you see as the value of this story about the early church?

This is Youth Sunday and the young people will not be preaching on the difficult story of Ananias and Sapphira.

Being good neighbors This startling, even terrifying, story of Ananias and Sapphira prompts us to think about being a good neighbor in community, whether our church community, the community where we live, or the community of family.

- * Recall a story about a disappointment you have encountered in a community. How did it shape your understanding of community?
- * What are the greatest obstacles you face when encountering new neighbors?
- * How might this story help us be good neighbors in community?

Close with prayer Invite prayer requests, especially for the communities to which the participants belong. Include these groups of people in the closing prayer, or enter into prayer and ask for such people to be named, closing with a sentence prayer, such as “Merciful God, give us the courage to be neighbors to everyone in our community, even the difficult people. Amen.”



WEEK SIX

The Widow of Nain

Luke 7:11-17

As we draw near to Holy Week, we return to the Gospel of Luke, early in Jesus' ministry. This story prepares us to imagine life where grief and despair have reigned. Notice how the grieving widow is accompanied by her community. Notice how Jesus delivers her son even though she is not able, perhaps, to enunciate a hope long dashed. Notice how the community around her is made whole again.

Pray Open with a brief prayer to gather the group together, or pray after the next activity.

Transition from everyday life to the small group setting Invite the participants to introduce themselves and answer one of the questions on page 25 or your own.

Review Ask for any comments or questions about the previous story of Ananias and Sapphira.

* What new thoughts came to mind as you listened to the adult education presentation?

Ask for comments if a question was assigned for their reflection during the week.

The story of the widow of Nain For the final week of the Lenten small groups, we return to the Gospel of Luke, but early in the ministry of Jesus. Invite a volunteer to read Luke 7:11–17. Before a reading from another translation, ask the participants to imagine they are in the crowd with the widow. After the second reading, ask:

- * If you were in the crowd accompanying the widow, what might you be thinking as all this takes place?
- * As you think about this story, where do you see yourself in the story? In the grief of the widow? In a crowd uncertain how to help? In the crowd traveling with Jesus? In Jesus' act of proliferating life?
- * Reflect on the hopes you carry that you are not usually able to share with others. Who is a good neighbor to you in those instances?

Being a good neighbor Two crowds appear in the story of the widow of Nain: the disciples and crowd traveling with Jesus and the crowd accompanying the widow in her grief. Ask:

- * What might being a good neighbor involve if you were traveling with Jesus from place to place to hear him teach and watch him heal?
- * What is required of a good neighbor when someone you know loses a family member?
- * We belong to several communities simultaneously (church, town, family, clubs, etc.). How are called to be a good neighbor in each setting?

Close with prayer Invite prayer requests, especially for the communities to which the participants belong. Include these groups of people in the closing prayer, or enter into prayer and ask for such people or groups to be named, closing with a sentence prayer, such as “God of all creation, give us the courage to be neighbors to everyone in our community, even in difficult times. Amen.”

Reflection after Sunday Although the small group will not meet *after* the final adult education presentation and sermon, you may want to continue the habit of reflecting on these questions:

- * How did the adult education presentation and the sermon work together?
- * What new thoughts came to mind as you listened to these interpretations?



Notes for Small Group Leaders

Whether you have led small groups before or this is your first time, consider this to be a Lenten spiritual practice for you. Relax. Leading a small group is not the same as leading a Bible study, where you might be expected to have some expertise, or considerable advanced preparation. The primary goal for a small group is to deepen the relationships among the participants as each one grows in relationship with God and Jesus and as Christ's disciple. This Lenten theme, "*Who Is My Neighbor?*" is particularly suited to challenge us as disciples.

At the first gathering, take time to review the group covenant on the back page of this booklet. It is important that each member of a small group is clear about the guidelines that make for a successful time together. Invite the group to add to the covenant.

A simple process for each week of "Who Is My Neighbor?" could be:

- * Prayer
- * Ask the opening question (see below)
- * Read the Bible passage aloud.
- * Discuss it with the questions suggested for each week.
- * Discuss the questions for "Being good neighbors".
- * Close with prayer. Inviting prayer requests is one more way to build connections in the group.

Opening Questions

Since a frequent reason for coming to a small group is to meet other members of the church, don't overlook the importance of this time for conversation. As you get to know the group, you or group members may want to pose the question. Even if the participants recognize each other from church events and worship, they may not know much about each other. This is a time to deepen friendships as well as to make the transition from the life around them to the life of the small group.

Week 1

- * Where did you go to elementary school?
- * Who is a neighbor from your childhood that you remember fondly?

Week 2

- * How many times have you moved to a new area in your adult life? Which move was the most surprising?
- * How were people who acted outside the norm treated when you were growing up?

Week 3

- * Setting aside cost, health concerns, and any other prohibiting factor, where would you like to go for a vacation?
- * What is something important to you that you have lost?

Week 4

- * When was the first time you stayed away from your home overnight? How did it go?
- * When has an encounter with a stranger away from your home had a surprising result?

Week 5

- * How did you get spending money as a child?
- * How did you learn about giving to the church?

Week 6

- * What is one thing you do during Holy Week or on Easter most years?
- * When a woman is described as a widow, what do you assume about her or expect of her? How has this idea changed since your childhood?

Thank you for leading a Lenten small group. May your experience be a joy as well as a spiritual discipline for you. May “Who Is My Neighbor?” refresh the Season of Lent and be a stimulus for being a good neighbor for you and each member of your small group.

Group Covenant

- * What happens in the group stays in the group. To build and maintain an atmosphere of trust, confidentiality is essential.
- * Speak and make space for others to speak. Each voice is important. If you are usually quiet, make an effort to offer your thoughts. If you speak out easily, hold back for others to speak or invite someone who hasn't spoken to speak.
- * Physically, be present at each gathering rather than treat attendance as just another option.
- * Mentally, listen to others and participate.
- * Focus on ideas, not the person. If you disagree, disagree with the idea, but don't belittle the person.
- * Speak from your own awareness. When offering an opinion, claim it as your opinion rather than make generalizations.
- * Everyone in the group is a learner. In a small group, there are no experts. Learning is a lifelong process.