

## ***TIME FOR SOME HEALTHY FUN?, LUKE 5:27-34***

The Art of Neighboring #3

◆**Intro:** I want you to think of a party you've been to. I mean a real party, like, a wedding reception. Because that's what Levi is doing. The text's original says he held a "receiving", a big one! A reception. So, ever been to one? Sweet drinks with bubbles are passed around. Maybe more than one course of foods. Light cakes are served. Candies are sent home. People dance unless they're Baptist. It's a celebration. It's a "come-and-rejoice-with-me" event.

◆This is important I think, because some folks might assume that what Levi was doing was having a last round with his buds before dragging his knuckles on the ground off to follow this Rabbi that had commandeered him into religious service. Kind of a "last fling." That's not it. This is delight (v33-34).

Why do people think that belief in God is a ball & chain?

When I was a boy growing up in the military and my friends would find out my dad was a Chaplain, they would often respond with something like, "Your dad's a priest? Oh, you can't have any fun!" Where did they get that notion, do you suppose? Isn't God holy, and almighty? Yes he is. But he was also at Levi's party, wasn't he?

◆**1. Being a good neighbor is as simple as having some fun.**

◆A. What is celebrating? Well, you know. It's enjoying something good together with someone else. In this case the good Levi was celebrating was his coming into a relationship with one fantastic person, God's very own son, Jesus! And he clearly

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wanted others to know the good news! The simple application is that the art of neighboring well (loving our neighbor as ourself) can be as straight forward as doing something you enjoy together.

[Kevin Harney call this 2 DEGREE RULE of evangelism: do something you already like to do, but pull the compass needle off dead north (just us), 2 degrees by doing it with someone not connected with God.] The object is to create relationship. First folks are strangers. - Then we become acquaintances. - And finally relationship forms. Celebrating something fun is a great way to move toward relationship. For relationships to form, our lives need to intersect.

◆I want us to notice something. After Levi was called by Jesus to be his follower, he didn't take a course on neighborhood evangelism, or leave for a retreat center to pray (both certainly good things.) No, what he did was follow Jesus where he went, and brought Jesus home where he, Levi, went. Principle for influencing the world for God's Kingdom? Follow Jesus where he goes. Bring Jesus with you where you go. He began to intersect his life with Christ with his other places in life. In his case, he held a reception!

1) Our focus on the art of neighboring this summer follows a very simple concept: Learn your neighbors' names. Acquaint yourself with them. (Find out about their lives, their kids, how long they've lived around there, etc. The

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magnetic BLOCK CHART has a.b.c for each neighbor:  
a)name, b)facts, c)something special) And do something fun together. For example, the authors of the book accompanying this study talked with a city leader about making an impact and her response was church people could make a huge impact in neighborhoods by simply instigating block parties. They did, and began to experience the things they wrote about in the book. I suggest we take the same challenge! Hold a block party. Find another neighbor you know, like the one who always seems to have people over, or the one who decorates for the season earliest, or most elaborately, –and bounce the idea off of them. For a simple outline of block party ideas you can go to [artofneighboring.com](http://artofneighboring.com) and click on “resources”.

2) That’s one idea. Not the only way. Levi had people from work over, right? Verse 29 says a large crowd of tax collectors and others were there. Levi was a taxman! He brought his co-workers home for a party! You and I can do the same. I have a friend in Highland who loves to bake, so she has baking parties where several ladies make something yummy together. One family stitched together old fabric, covered an entire wall of the garage, and held a “drive-in” movie night for the neighborhood.

3) This by the way, is why this church built our gym. (And it shows great insight on the part of our forebears in Sunrise.)

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It's why we have volleyball on Monday nights and basketball on Tuesday nights and pickle ball on Saturday morning.

Make friends doing something fun together. Share life and you'll also have a chance to share your love for Jesus and how he helps you survive.

But now note this. No one playing basketball is going to commit their heart to Jesus just because the court was in a church. No one is going to share a deep pain or need with you, that you know God could heal, just because there was a prayer at the end of the game. People come to Jesus on the arm of a friend, so if game night is the full extent of our interaction with an individual, it's not likely we'll have much influence even if it was at a church. There's a handy way of remembering that loving your neighbor is a deeper process than mere play. It's called the BLESS practices.

Begin with prayer

Listen to their story (Ask questions)

Eat together (a sign of friendship, builds relationship)

Serve and ask for help

Share your story and faith

It's a process. Maybe you are only at praying for a neighbor. Maybe it's time to eat together. But it's not likely that you will share your story, and Jesus' story at the beginning of loving your neighbor. It's a process. Evaluate at which stage you might be with a friend you're thinking of.

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◆B. Now a disclaimer: Don't make it your goal to have the whole block in church by Christmas. I'm letting you off the hook. You don't have to do it. Loving your neighbor is a life- process. Change happens slowly. You don't do 5 pull-ups and suddenly have huge biceps the next day, do you? Neither do we mention Jesus once and expect our friend to want to come to church. Take small steps. But take steps. Remember, loving your neighbor is not supposed to be anxiety provoking! You are not being assigned to convert your whole block by the end of summer! You are being invited to just start to enjoy them. That's clearly what Jesus did. Neighboring can be as simple as celebrating something you like with people you'd like to know more.

◆

### **◆2. Being a good neighbor includes a heart for healing.**

◆Let me explain. What does a physician do? He or she seeks to heal. And this is the role Jesus took in Levi's party, right? In verse 31 Jesus identifies himself as a doctor. He is partying/ mingling in order to call people to healthier life.

◆A. Unlike Jesus, sometimes God-followers have practiced avoidance of people who don't. Like tax collectors. Levi was one. What was a tax collector? Romans farmed out tax collecting to the nationals. The highest bidder got the job and the strength of Rome to enforce it. "Ill get you \$100/person."

"I'll get you \$200!"

"Sold! The job is yours."

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◆ Then they could go and demand whatever they could get, as long as Rome got their \$200. So tax collectors were wealthy people on the backs of their own people. That made them a kind of traitor. And Israel had bought into the avoidance technique. That's why taxmen get a whole separate category! "Tax collectors and sinners." Aren't they in the sinner category already? Yes, but they're worse than your average cheat, adulterer, or trafficker. They were superlative sinners! A tax collector was not allowed to be a witness in court. Was not allowed to attend church even! But Jesus goes to a party with them. Most Jews wouldn't even talk to a tax collector. But Jesus did. What does this tell you?

◆ B. Don't get Jesus wrong. By associating with sinful people Jesus was never endorsing sin, or joining in it just to get close. Jesus doesn't say, "Hey these people are just as good as you. They were born this way, so cut them some slack." No, Jesus came to heal, and only if you're sick do you need healing. He called Levi in order to heal Levi. When a Rabbi calls, the disciple goes and lives with him, eats with him, learns from him, becomes like him. So Levi was called to become like Jesus. He's going into ministry. Jesus isn't endorsing sin when he associates with sinners. He's inviting us to a better place.

*"But whatever happens to me, you must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, as citizens of heaven." Philipians 1:27 NLT.*

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◆ There are two views of the banquet attendees in this story. One is the view of a Judge (the Pharisees watching from across the street) and the other is the view of a Doctor. Only one of those views allowed for mixing.

◆ C. I'll bet the mix was a bit awkward. What did they talk about, tax collectors and the Rabbi's disciples? That's like seminary students stopping in at a drug house for lunch. I can guarantee these two groups had never had lunch together before this. If it was anything like I experience as a disciple of Jesus there was a fair amount of nervousness present. You probably won't believe it, but when a preacher is in the group all dynamic changes. Often when meeting new people I avoid telling them what I do because I know what's coming.

    Their eyes widen just a bit, they'll take a step back.

    You can see the gears turning (Did I cuss at all so far in this conversation.?)

    And the air in the room drops a few degrees. People shiver.

◆ Once I was **golfing** with a fellow and the guy swore with reference to a reservoir and the big cement wall-thing the holds the water back..., but then he caught himself and said, "oops I mean "darn", darn darn darn it. I wanted to say, "It's OK. I know the feeling." but he dashed off after his ball saying darn all the way. When I was learning to fly **PPG** last month, the instructor was rigging me up and something got tangled so he called on Jesus name, but then he said to me, "Oh sorry, I didn't mean to

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offend you.” I said, “Oh I believe in him too! And I think he understands.” The drummer in our Praise Team up north and I would go to the bars where my guitar teacher’s band was playing just to hear him and try to create more relationship. Sometimes it felt a little awkward. I’ll bet that happened at Levi’s banquet too.

◆**Conclusion:** How did Jesus move into Levi’s world and not seem awkward? With the eyes of a doctor, he genuinely wanted to bring healing and good. What do you see around you? A person with bitterness at life, failing at relationships? Or someone God could restore? A young girl with an addiction? Or someone God wants to celebrate life with? With the eyes of a doctor, you look behind the wardrobe, the language, the habits of people -for a need, or a hurt that God can heal and the awkwardness can disappear.

◆We love because He loves. We have a cure to share. We were sick and a doctor found us! So we preach good news: forgiveness of sins, hope for eternity, the overcoming of darkness in life. Being a truly good neighbor can simply mean celebrating something good with your neighbor. The best thing of course is that Jesus is a living, powerful person. He can change our lives if we let him into them. He can change other peoples lives too! Open your heart to him. Open your heart to them!