

NEIGHBORS AND WISDOM

The Ministry of Neighboring #4, Proverbs

February 28, 2021

Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again,
tomorrow I will give it"—when you have it with you.
Do not plan evil against your neighbor, who dwells trustingly beside you.
Proverbs 3:28-29

Good fences make good neighbors (but read Deuteronomy 23:24-25)

My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,
if you have struck hands in pledge for another,
² if you have been trapped by what you said,
ensnared by the words of your mouth,
³ then do this, my son, to free yourself,
since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands:
Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor!
⁴ Allow no sleep to your eyes,
no slumber to your eyelids.
⁵ Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter,
like a bird from the snare of the fowler.

Proverbs 6 (see *The Art of Neighboring*, Chapter 9, page 129)

- 1) Neighboring (like good boundaries) is always “with” and rarely “for”
- 2) For neighbors, a gift is usually better than a loan (remember, we are in Wisdom now!)
- 3) Generosity builds trust more than dependence or enmeshment

Neighbors and disaster

¹⁰ Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father,
and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you—
better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

Proverbs 27:10 (see Ecclesiastes 11:1)

- 1) Neighboring builds community capacity
- 2) Preparation is a great way to love our neighbors!

Words matter (bad words lead to bigger problems)

- ⁹ With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor,
but through knowledge the righteous escape
- ¹² A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor,
but a man of understanding holds his tongue.

Proverbs 11 (see Ecclesiastes 5:1-7)

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

James 3:9-12 (see Jesus' commentary on the Law in Matthew 5)

- 1) Good neighboring does not require much speech (one of the lessons learned by Job's neighbors)
- 2) Note Commandments #9 and #10 mention my neighbor (Deuteronomy 5:20-21)
- 3) James and Jesus agree: our words reveal something about our heart

Flattery is dangerous and restraint is necessary

- ⁵ *A man who flatters his neighbor
spreads a net for his feet.*
- ⁶ *An evil man is ensnared in his transgression,
but a righteous man sings and rejoices.*
- ⁷ *A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.*
- ⁸ *Scoffers set a city aflame,
but the wise turn away wrath.*
- ⁹ *If a wise man has an argument with a fool,
the fool only rages and laughs, and there is no quiet.*
- ¹⁰ *Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless
and seek the life of the upright.*
- ¹¹ *A fool gives full vent to his spirit,
but a wise man quietly holds it back.*

Proverbs 27 (go to Leviticus 19:17 and "rebuke"; Ephesians 4:15 and "speaking the truth")

- 1) *Shalom* rules in a "quiet" neighborhood (isn't this the point of James 3:13-18?)
- 2) Wisdom does more listening than speaking

Things I learned this week about neighboring

1) Presence and incarnation are essential to good neighboring

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Corinthians 2:3

¹⁴ *The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.*

John 1:14 (from *The Message*)

Awaken to the mystery of being there,
and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.

John O'Donohue, *Bless the Space Between Us*, "For Presence"

2) When my neighbor is in prison

*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.*

¹¹ *The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.*

¹² *Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*

Isaiah 58 (text from the Love Your Neighbor Conference, March 2020, at Calvin Seminary)

3) Live eschatologically with our neighbors

¹⁰ *"In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree," declares the LORD Almighty.*"

Zechariah 3:10 (remember Lewis: "It is not mere mortals")

Resources for a ministry of neighboring

Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door* (Baker Books, 2012)

Kevin Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People* (Zondervan, 2009)

Spurgeon has a classic sermon, “Go, and Do Thou Likewise” at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-good-samaritan/#flipbook/>

Ligonier’s “Ministry of Presence” at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/ministry-presence/>

John O’Donohue’s *Bless the Space Between Us* (Doubleday, 2008) is a great encouragement for a ministry of presence.

I appreciated Deffinbaugh’s sermon at <https://bible.org/seriespage/36-good-samaritan-luke-1025-37>

I have really appreciated D. A. Carson’s Good Samaritan video at <https://youtu.be/DvRIpoRnsU>

Calvin Seminary’s “Loving Your Neighbor” *Forum* (Winter 2021; 28:1). This issue is not yet available online but Pastor Fakkema has copies if you are interested.

This Regent College lecture featuring non-North American mission leaders is a good introduction to the challenge of serving from a position of power: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zU5UrExPhQM>

I found this podcast transcript from Julie Roys very helpful in understanding the contemporary dangers of the “Temple Industrial Complex,” at <https://julieroys.com/gospel-meets-evangelical-industrial-complex/>

II. רֵעַ, [רֵיעַ]₁₈₇ n.m. Pr 17:17 friend, companion, fellow; רַ abs. 2 S 13:3 +, cstr. 1 Ch 27:33; sf. רֵעִי Jb 31:9 +, רֵעֶה Dt 5:17 +, רֵעֶה Ex 2:13 +, also רֵעֶיהָ 2 S 12:11 (sg.; Ges^{93 ss}), רֵעֶהוּ (Ges^{84 a i}) Gn 11:3 + 114 times, רֵעוּ Je 6:21, רֵעֶה 3:20; pl. רֵעִים Je 3:1 +, cstr. רֵעֵי Jb 2:11; sf. רֵעִיו 32:3, רֵעֶהוּ (Ges^{91 k}) 42:10; 1 S 30:26, רֵעֶכֶם Jb 6:27, etc.; 1. *friend* Gn 38:12, 20 (J), 1 S 30:26; 2 S 13:3; 1 K 16:11 (Ⓣ om.); רֵעֶהוּ אֲשֶׁר כְּנַפְשֶׁךָ Dt 13:7; רֵעֶהוּ מִתֶּךָ Pr 27:9 (text dub., v. Toy); Mi 7:5 (|| אֲלוֹהֵי), Je 9:3 (|| אֶחָ), 19:9 La 1:2 (+ אֲהַבֶּיהָ), ψ 35:14 (|| אֶחָ) + 3 times ψψ; especially Jb 2:11; 6:14 + 8 times Jb, Pr 17:17; 18:24 + 8 times Pr (12:26 v. מֵרֵעַ infr.), Ct 5:1 (|| דֹּדִים); associates Zc 3:8; term. techn. הַמְּלִיךָ רַ 1 Ch 27:33 (v. רֵעֶה), cf. 2 S 16:17⁰; of lover Ct 5:16 (|| דֹּדִי), husband Je 3:20, paramours Ho 3:1; Je 3:1; metaph. רֵעַ לְבָנוֹת יַעֲנָה Jb 30:29 (|| אֶת לְתַנִּים). 2. in weaker sense, *fellow, fellow-citizen even another person*, with whom one stands in recipr. relations, Ex 2:13; 20:16, 17⁰; (Gi v 13:14⁰); = Dt 5:17, 18⁰; Ex 21:14; 22:7, 8, 10, 25 (all E), Lv 19:13, 16, 18; 20:10 (all H), Dt 4:42; 15:2⁰ + 11 times Dt, Jos 20:5 (D), Ju 7:14; Je 9:7; 22:13; 29:23; Ez 18:6, 11, 15; 22:11, 12; Hb 2:15; Jb 16:21; Ru 4:7 ψ 15:3; 28:3; 101:5 Pr 3:28, 29; 6:1 (|| זָר!) + 18 times Pr; רֵעוּן Je 6:21; 1 S 15:28 *hath given* (the kingdom) *to thy fellow*, = another than thou, so 28:17; 2 S 12:11; so also אִישׁ¹

¹ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (pp. 945–946). Oxford: Clarendon Press.