

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

Monthly Newsletter

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Article, Story, and Resource contributed by Karen Wilk, Neighbourhood Life Lead on the
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The Primary Responsibility of the Church

James K. A. Smith (author of *Desiring the Kingdom*) suggests that the **primary responsibility of the church is to live God's story for the world**. If this is our primary role, one must ask: what does it look like to live God's story? And how do we do that more and better? While our answer could be expansive, broad, and deep, perhaps it could also be quite simple. Perhaps it could be the answer we learned in Sunday school: Jesus. What does it look like to live God's story? It looks like Jesus!

Our role is to be disciples who are being formed more and more into the likeness of Jesus and who are thus discovering and participating in what Jesus, by the Spirit, is already doing in the world and bearing witness to him.

To be like Jesus is to *love like Jesus*. Jesus' love is unconditional, inclusive, and relational. John affirms that love is God's very nature (1 John 4) from beginning to end. And love, as Jesus taught and lived it, is always about the other, always extending itself to welcome, accept, and be with. In other words, love is missional and to be missional is to love for sake of the other, *for God so loves the world*.

In Mark 12:28–34 and Matthew 22:34–40, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is. One might rephrase that as, what is *the primary responsibility of the church* – the most important thing that the people of God are to be about? His answer: love your neighbour. In Luke, he illustrates this instruction with the parable of the good Samaritan, which concludes, "go and do likewise" (10:25–37). His first followers reinforce the significance of the greatest. Paul declares that if we love our neighbours, we **fulfill** the requirements of God's law (Romans 13:8b) and that "the **whole law** is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). James calls it **the royal law** (James 2:8).

Despite the fact that Jesus' answer to how we are to live God's story for the world seems quite clear and straightforward, we have not always been very good at keeping it. It is often easier to meet a need with a cheque, project, event, or answer than it is to actually get to know and love those who live right next door in tangible, flesh-and-blood ways. But what if this is our primary role, our primary challenge, calling, and commitment?

Thanks be to God, Jesus has not only shown the Way, but he made and IS the Way. God in Christ is already at work in our neighbourhoods, and God already loves our neighbours, more than we can or ever will.

Yet, I wonder what would happen, how our communities and perhaps the whole world might be changed, if we all joined Jesus in loving our neighbours, Jesus' way?

NEIGHBOURHOOD STORY

A friend of mine, Judy,* who is also seeking to join God in her neighbourhood and love her neighbours, recently shared this story with me. She explained that she had noticed that the neighbour across the street from her (who had been her aerobics teacher 15 years ago) had been getting many ambulance visits. Judy felt motivated to try to renew her relationship with her. One afternoon when Judy tentatively went over to deliver some fresh carrots from her garden, her neighbour was *sitting outside in the front*, and they had a good conversation. It concluded with Judy suggesting that they sit and knit together on her veranda while the weather was still nice. Judy had recently learned to knit in a neighbourhood group she had help get started. She reflected, *I love how God works things together!*

Judy plays pickleball several times a week with neighbours, too. She says that there has been a shift for her. She has shifted from feeling guilty about 'wasting time' in these neighbourhood endeavours to thanking God for the gift of neighbouring, not only for the fun, exercise, and relationships but for recognizing neighbouring as an opportunity to discover God at work, and love people in Jesus' name.

It is truly amazing that God can use the things we enjoy such that we are participating in God's good work—his Kingdom come near!

Judy confesses, *I have a very strong inner critic who tells me I am just making this up as a way to justify enjoying myself. I am trying to reject this voice and pray for the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me each day.*

May we all join Judy in this prayer—and in discovering how we can participate in God's good work right where we live, with and amongst our neighbours.

* Name changed.

RESOURCES

Come & See Webinar

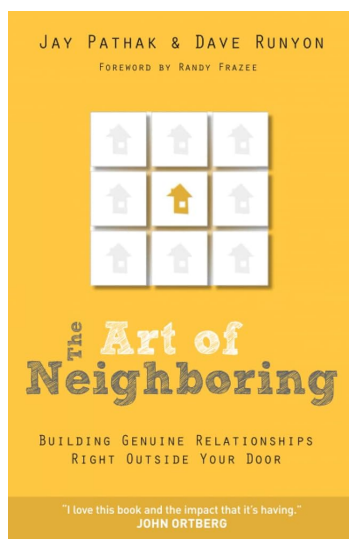
Join us for an introduction to Neighbourhood Life this fall. Register now for this 90-minute, online, interactive workshop in which you will have the opportunity to 'come and see' what this initiative is all about. [Register here](#).

Watch

[Why Join God in the Neighborhood?](#) A 5-minute video from Alan Roxburgh.

Read

Google Review: [The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door](#) by Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon (Baker Books, 2012)



Once upon a time, people knew their neighbors. They talked to them, had cook-outs with them, and went to church with them. In our time of unprecedented mobility and increasing isolationism, it's hard to make lasting connections with those who live right outside our front door. We have hundreds of "friends" through online social networking, but we often don't even know the full name of the person who lives right next door.

This unique and inspiring book asks the question: What is the most loving thing I can do for the people who live on my street or in my apartment building? Through compelling true stories of lives impacted, the authors show readers how to create genuine friendships with the people who live in closest proximity to them. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter make this book perfect for small groups or individual study.