

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

Monthly Newsletter

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Article, Story, and Resource contributed by Karen Wilk

When Jesus Said 'Take Nothing'

Could Jesus be saying that entering the house of another is like entering the holy temple? That living in our neighborhood is sacred work in a sacred place?

"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals."

—Luke 10:4a

This instruction often catches us off guard during Neighbourhood Life gatherings when we're spending time reading and reflecting on Jesus sending out his followers in Luke 10. We are to go with nothing? No programs, no right answers, agendas, strategies, Roman roads, or expertise? No invitations to services, projects, or events? Really, we are to go with just ourselves?

Eugene Peterson affirms it in The Message translation of Matthew 10:10 and in Luke 9:3: "You are the equipment."

In *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Alan Roxburgh compares Jesus' instruction to the experience of the Israelites in exile in Jeremiah 29: "Like the exiles in Jeremiah 29 seeking the peace and well-being of the city—[we are being instructed] to reenter the life of the local people, listen to their stories, and love them deeply without feeling the need to 'sell' them anything or 'make a pitch'—and without assuming that we already know what they need and what the gospel ought to look like in this time and place."

Could we "just" do that in our neighbourhoods? Hang out, share a cup of sugar, a rake, a listening ear? Go for a walk together, have a mug of coffee, ask for help? Such actions might be a lot like how Jesus lived among us on Earth: accepting people as they were and eating at their tables, drinking from their wells, partying at their celebrations, touching their unclean skin, loving them deeply. Maybe that's what it looks like for the kingdom of God to come near?

But that's not all. There's another layer to this verse in Luke 10—one that twenty-first-century readers likely miss but that would have jolted first-century listeners. Jesus quotes the exact words of the Halacha and Oral Law of ancient Jewish tradition:

"He may not enter into the Temple Mount with his staff or his sandal or his wallet, or with the dust upon his feet." —Mishnah, Tractate Berakot 9:5

"It has been taught...a man must not go up to the hill of the Temple neither with shoes, nor with dust on his feet, nor with money wrapped in a cloth, nor with a girdle [tunic, cloak] on."
—Palestinian Gemara, Tractate Berakot 9:5 (8)

"As it has been taught: A man should not enter the Temple Mount either with his staff in his hand, or his shoe on his foot, or with his money tied up in his cloth, or with his money bag slung over his shoulder."

—Babylonian Gemara, Tractate Berakot 62:b

Could Jesus be saying that entering the house and village of another is like entering the holy Temple? That being sent to remain among our neighbours is sacred work in a sacred place? Could Jesus be saying that where he sent us, placed us, and asked us to remain is actually holy ground where God dwells?

In *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church*, author and missiologist Michael Frost explains:

Any Jewish listener to Jesus' instructions about purses, bags and sandals would have immediately recognized that these are the very same instructions given to those worshippers who approach the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Jesus is sending his disciples out into the world, like a faithful Jewish pilgrim would prepare to worship Yahweh on his mountain. The symbolism is unmistakable. All of Israel's and Judah's hope for the future house of God, as prophesied in Old Testament passages . . . are being fulfilled in the mission of Jesus. And this mission is not located on Mount Zion, but in the households to whom the disciples have been sent. . . . By sending his disciples out into the mission field like penitent worshippers approaching the Temple Mount, he is saying that the world is not his parish, but the world is his temple.

What if we really believed this? And acted on it?

That's our Neighbourhood Life invitation—to discover how God is working in our neighborhoods and to join in that work.

How will you join God at work in your neighborhood this week? How are you going and remaining? Perhaps it begins (again) by asking God to send and empower us—giving us ears to hear and eyes to see God's temple right where we live. We look forward to hearing your stories and your participation in our Neighbourhood Life initiatives.

We took nothing. We didn't have the capacity to come alongside a neighbour in need, so I inquired with another neighbour, who was coming out of her own struggles. Katie* had just separated from her husband and was feeling lonely, isolated and empty—she had too much 'blank space' in her calendar. I had been connecting with her, listening, being present. We went on walks, and I started inviting her to community initiatives and neighbourhood activities that she had previously shown no interest in. She showed up! Her participation lifted her spirits and opened her eyes to all the people around her, including 'a neighbour in need.' Shabu* was an 80-year-old recent widow whose 50-year-old son with Down Syndrome had also just had to be moved to a group home as she could no longer care for him. She too was lonely and especially so during our long, cold winters when she did not feel comfortable going out. Her daughter who lives in the States emailed me and asked if I could help her find a 'social service' to assist her mother. I said, no; That is what neighbours are for!

I then asked Katie if she would be willing to connect with Shabu on a regular basis. She thought it was a great idea! Shabu, like Katie, needed company, as well as assistance with getting to various appointments, gardening, and occasionally basic housekeeping and yard work. Katie started stopping in for tea with Shabu. Shabu invited Katie to concerts and a free weekly art class. Katie planted sweet peas, other flowers, and herbs in Shabu's garden. A mutually enriching relationship is developing for which both are very appreciative. While we are still engaged with both of them, they are now there for one another—it's not up to us! Alongside, I have the opportunity to talk with them frequently about love of neighbour, about Jesus who not only taught this posture and practice but lived it, and about how the goodness, generosity, and care they are experiencing is a sign of the God of love at work.

Shabu's daughter emailed me. Somehow, thousands of miles away God was also at work. She explained that after reading our neighbourhood newsletter, she had 'been moved to google' my name and started reading some of my articles. She wrote (shared with permission):

I had an "aha!" moment when I realized my parents and brother have been happily hanging out at block parties and BBQs at your home. They even shared with me that Karen is a pastor, and you have become someone they respect and like a lot—all this despite the fact that both my mom and dad had negative experiences with Christians when they were fairly young.

Long story short, both my parents raised my brother and me to avoid all organized religions and to distrust anyone who claimed to be a minister or priest from God. They were extremely skeptical and resistant to talk of religion or spirituality. (The televangelist scandals in the '80s didn't help with this.)

I now realize that thanks to your prayers (and the prayers of Christians who live right next door to me), my spiritual labyrinth brought me on a 20-year journey through yoga, Zen Buddhist practices, Vipassana meditation, a year-long project on silence, and finally to entering the Church.

...I think the experience of converting from atheism to Christian might be difficult to understand for Christians who were raised in Christian families.

... Anyway, I'm just writing to thank you both for your discipleship, for gently and slowly showing my family the love of our Lord, and for embodying the Incarnate God who walks among us daily.

My mother has started to text me asking me to "pray for _" which was a huge surprise, since our family NEVER spoke of prayer growing up.

...Each of these baby steps is a miracle!

May we continue to 'take nothing,' discover we're on holy ground, and see that "each of these baby steps is a miracle!"

*(names changed to protect their privacy)

RESOURCES

There are so many books and other resources on neighbourhood now—please share with us which ones have inspired and encouraged you. Here are a few perhaps less familiar ones for your consideration:

Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time (2015) by Alan J. Roxburgh – In this text, we are invited to "to follow the Spirit into our neighborhoods, re-engage with the mission of God, and re-imagine the whole enterprise of church." It provides a helpful overview of the foundational posture and parameters of our Neighbourhood Life initiatives.

The Bees of Rainbow Falls: Finding Faith, Imagination, and Delight in Your Neighbourhood (2017) by Preston Pouteaux – This book "reminds us that we matter to our community, that goodness is found all around us, and that new life emerges out of the small and sublime." As a pastor and a beekeeper, Preston inspires and challenges to step out our front doors and join God in our neighbourhoods.

Don't Invite Them to Church: Moving from a Come and See to a Go and Be Church (2010) – A guidebook by Karen Wilk to "help you, your small group, or your church get started in neighbourhood ministry and missional living. It includes ideas for group meetings, practices to help you develop a better spiritual life, and real-life ideas for reaching out to your neighborhood. If you really want to know your neighbors and love them like Jesus would, don't invite them to church. BE the church."

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

- Book a Neighbourhood Life online preview workshop with your leadership, missions/ outreach teams and/or your whole congregation or region!
- Sign up for a four-session online Neighbourhood Life introductory course.
- Consider forming/joining a Neighbourhood Life learning community in your area.
- Contact your Missional Initiatives Team for more information (karen.wilk@forgecanada.ca).