

# GCI CHURCH HACKS

## FAITH AVENUE: CONNECT GROUPS



### Why Connect Groups?

» **Discipleship occurs in life on life situations.** Through learning, eating, celebrating, and grieving together scripture is brought to life and place sharing occurs. In shared spaces we encounter the living Christ in our relationships. Connect groups are designed to cultivate Christ-centered friendships that encourage, challenge, and focus our lives towards a growing relationship with Jesus.



» **Smaller groups are more effective.** The power of a connect group is not the content provided but the relationships that develop. The conversational style of connect groups facilitates a space for vulnerability to occur, and intimacy and accountability to flow. Questions and answers in a safe space allows for personal discovery and gospel transformation to follow. In a smaller setting we are transformed both individually and as a whole. The importance of providing spaces to dig deeper in smaller group has become more evident since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Even after group size is no longer a safety issue, having small gatherings outside of the Sunday service will be even more important for churches, as many members will continue to gather digitally for worship.



» **Connect groups take us outside of our church walls and into the community.** The atmosphere of a connect group is a great entry point for a visitor or person unfamiliar with church. Meeting in a home and with fewer people is more comfortable than a large group setting with unfamiliar rituals and routines. The faith avenue is the connecting point between the church and your neighborhood.

Check out our new Curriculum in our [On Being series](https://resources.gci.org/faith). [Being a Neighbor](https://resources.gci.org/faith) – A six-week series on Jesus' call for his disciples to love our neighbors. Visit <https://resources.gci.org/faith> for more Connect Group Resources.



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# BEING A NEIGHBOR





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1: BEING A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2: WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBORS?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3: MARY AND MARTHA</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4: BEING SENT</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5: PLACE SHARING</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6: PARTICIPATING IN CHRIST'S WORK AS A NEIGHBOR</b>	<b>26</b>

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# 1

## BEING A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR

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## 1: BEING A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR



## WELCOME/ICEBREAKER 15 mins

## OPENING PRAYER 🕒 5 mins

*Father God, we ask for healthy, respectful, and growing relationships between neighbors. We pray that different cultures and different age groups will be able to understand and care for one another in our neighborhood. We pray that each and every neighbor will experience your love and come to see you as the God who is for them and drawing them to yourself. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*



Before the reading, introduce this structure so that participants can watch for it.



Luke 10 contains three different occasions:

1. Sending and receiving the 72 disciples
2. Addressing the lawyer's question with the classic Good Samaritan parable
3. A house visit to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.



We are doing a quick “bird’s-eye-view” reading of a turning point in Jesus’ ministry, and we will unpack these stories one at a time over the next few weeks. Don’t worry if you don’t get all the details on this initial read-through.

[illegible]



This an important turning point in Jesus' life, in which Luke writes that Jesus "set his face toward Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), where he will ultimately face death. He leaves his home base of ministry in Galilee (where he grew up) and heads toward danger.

Read Luke 10 (leader or reader from group)

## DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE 30 mins

Luke 10 marks a significant turn in Christ's earthly mission as he focuses in on his final months and weeks.

In these stories, Jesus interacts with three different kinds of “neighbors” and relationships:



1. Sending the disciples—Jesus sends them into the wide world, essentially, going to places where they don't know anyone. In a larger sense, this is the “big picture” neighbor in which we keep in sight God's love for the world in general and his desire to see the gospel preached to everyone.
2. Good Samaritan—Jesus tells a story of reaching out to our neighbor, even if they are our “enemy.” He also gives us pictures of those, even religious leaders, who might care about some vague principles of humanity but aren't present when practical help is needed.
3. Mary and Martha—Jesus teaches at the house of these two sisters, and we see a contrast of being present (Mary) with constantly “doing” (Martha).

At what points in Luke 10 do you see Jesus excited and pleased?

He is excited and pleased by human understanding, by participation, and most of all by relationship that extends from this world to the next (“Rejoice that your name is written in the Book of Life” 10:20).

## Notes

[illegible]



**? APPLICATION DISCUSSION** **🕒 10 mins**

Summarize what was discussed, leading to a call to action.  
Bring out of the participants:

- Where are you among these three stories? Do you find yourself identifying with one of the characters more than the others? Why or why not?
- What is the personal call? Is there something here that could shape the way you act, think and see yourself this week?

★ **DIVINE PARTICIPATION** ⌚ 5 mins

What are some practical action steps you can take to implement the application above throughout the week?

What step will you take in this next week to understand more deeply, to participate more actively, and to relate to Jesus more closely?

*We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next-door neighbors. Hence, they come to us clad in all the careless terrors of nature; they are as strange as the stars, as reckless and indifferent as the rain. They are human, the most terrible of the beasts. That is why the old religions and the old scriptural language showed so sharp a wisdom when they spoke, not of one's duty towards humanity, but one's duty towards one's neighbor.*

-GK Chesterton (20th century British theologian)

## CLOSING PRAYER 🕒 5 mins

Collect prayer requests from the group and assign prayer partners for the week, or have one person send out the list to the group. Then close with a prayer or one of the sample exercises.

## Notes

[illegible]



## 2

# WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBORS?

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## 2: WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBORS?



**WELCOME/ICEBREAKER** 🕒 15 mins

### OPENING PRAYER 1 min

*Father God, Lord Jesus, and Holy Spirit, we lift up the names that were mentioned, and we thank you for good neighbors. We seek your involvement and power that all of our neighbors would flourish. It is our hearts' desire that all of our neighbors experience your love and come to know Jesus. Make us good stewards of your love to each one of our neighbors and help us learn from them as relationships blossom and grow. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

**SCRIPTURE READING** ⌚ 5 mins

## Luke chapter 10:25-37

Read once for review.



Ask participants to close their eyes during a second reading. This time, they should consider which character in the story that they relate to best (characters include lawyer, Jewish victim, robbers, priest/Levite, Samaritan, and innkeeper)

[illegible]





## DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE 30 mins



Arrange each member of the small group to sit with those who identify with the same character that he or she most identifies with. Ask them to share their connection with their character. Use the prompts below to generate discussion.

## Why the lawyer?

An expert in Old Testament Jewish laws. He is a person of detail and exactness. Are you often trying to check off all the right boxes?

## Why the victim?

We know that the man in the ditch was Jewish and left “half dead,” with no other details. Has life been a series of events that has left you beat up?

## Why a robber?

The road from Jericho to Jerusalem was notorious for bandits and roadside muggings. Has your life has been one of intimidating and taking from others?

## Why a priest/Levite?

Jericho was home to many priests and Levites, so this was a real-life example of their travelling on this 19-mile stretch of roadway. The Old Testament law prescribed their duty to relieve suffering of human or beast, and yet they look and turn away. Are they acting out of fear, thinking that maybe the robbers are close by? Are they more concerned about obligations at the temple and they don't want to be ceremonially unclean? How do you relate to their inaction?

## Notes

[illegible]



## Why the Samaritan?

Samaritans were viewed as a mongrel race by the Israelites, and definitely not seen as a neighbor by the Jewish lawyer. The Samaritan acts with compassion – true heartfelt empathy and concern (more than a paramedic doing his duty). The Samaritan binds the man's wounds, anointing with wine for cleansing and oil for healing. He places the wounded man on his donkey and takes him to the nearest inn (hospital of the day). And more than just dropping him off, he gives the innkeeper two days wages for the care of the man and agrees to pay more upon return. During a crisis, are you the kind of person who runs toward the danger to help and serve?

## Why the innkeeper?

Other than identifying this person in the story, nothing else is mentioned. We can imply that he or she would be a caregiver, perhaps a nurse or medic. Are you the support person who will serve tirelessly when a hurting person is brought to you?

**? APPLICATION DISCUSSION** **🕒 10 mins**

Summarize what was discussed, leading to a call to action.  
Bring out of the participants:

- **Where do you see Jesus in the parable?**  
In the Samaritan, for sure. How about in the victim?  
The innkeeper? Other thoughts?
- **How was the lawyer who asked Jesus the original question impacted by the story?**

*The lawyer identifies the one showing mercy as being neighborly, what was previously associated with ethnicity or a specific people group, is now tied to a posture of compassion and mercy.*

## Notes

[illegible]



★ **DIVINE PARTICIPATION** ⌚ **5 mins**

Take some practical action steps to implement the application above throughout the week.

- What step will you take in this next week to be the best version of you, and to be a good neighbor to people who need help?
- How can you show, in action, what you might believe theologically, especially to a difficult person or situation? In other words, how can you let God's love for that person show through you, especially when you have little love for them yourself?

**CLOSING PRAYER** 🕒 10 mins

Collect prayer requests from the group and assign prayer partners for the week or have one person send out the list to the group. Then close with a prayer or one of the sample exercises.

## Notes

[illegible]



# 3

## MARY AND MARTHA

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### 3: MARY AND MARTHA



**WELCOME/ICEBREAKER** 🕒 15 mins

**SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER** 🕒 1 mins

Heavenly Father, today as we examine the relational dynamics of Jesus between two sisters, we ask for your presence in families in our neighborhood. We pray for single people living alone, for their peace and protection. We pray for strength and goodwill between the marriages in our neighborhood. We ask for strong bonds of love between the children, teenagers, adults, and grandparents. We pray that all peoples in our neighborhood in all stages and configurations would demonstrate love for one another. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.



### SCRIPTURE READING 1 min

## Luke 10:38-42

[illegible]





## DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE 30 mins



In an interactive story-telling style, unpack the scripture:

### Where does this story take place?

Bethany is a village near the Mount of Olives and less than two miles from the center of Jerusalem; it is on the road to Jericho (remember the setting of The Good Samaritan story?).

It is the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary, and we find out later that their brother Lazarus lives with them. It is implied that Martha is the older sister and the owner of the house.

Is it coincidental that Jesus would meet people in their homes? Not at all! Teaching, fellowshiping, sharing time and food is such a natural fit for him. Home can also be a safe place for strangers you are just getting to know – the Bible calls this hospitality.

## What is the posture of Mary?

Mary is seated at the feet of Jesus. Sitting at another's feet meant being a disciple and under their instruction (Acts 22:3). Her posture was that of student to teacher, but her respect went further, perhaps to Messiah, Lord, and friend.

## What is Martha up to?

Martha was distracted by and cumbered with “much serving.” Is she preparing a snack tray of dates and olives? Is she squeezing fruits from Jericho for a juice drink? The Bible doesn’t fill in these blanks. Is it her intent to simply serve Jesus, or perhaps to impress Jesus, making it more about her?

Martha has ill feelings toward her sister who has left her to be alone in the kitchen. Martha acts boldly toward Jesus, asking him to command Mary to come to her aid.

## Notes

[illegible]



## What is the response of Jesus?

Can you see Jesus smiling, shaking his head, and exclaiming “Martha, Martha”? Your inward worry and your outward bustling about are not the higher good. Your elaborate preparations are taking you away from my teaching and experiencing my friendship and love.

Choosing and attending to the deep relationship that Jesus offers to us is the higher good and has eternal worth that cannot be taken away.

Is this story meant to reveal the intrinsic value of relationships over tasks?

In part, probably yes. It is our “being in Christ” that directly impacts our “doing.” It takes Christ in us to discern how and where we are spending our time and energy, and even to determine what our motivations are.

Instead of comparing contemplative Christians versus action-oriented Christians, it seems that Jesus wants us all to choose connection and reliance on him and do all things to his glory. Being and doing can find harmony in a life centered in Jesus. There are times to listen, and times to work.

## Notes

[illegible]



**? APPLICATION DISCUSSION** **🕒 10 mins**

Give a short summary of what was discussed, then lead into a call to action. Bring out of the participants:

- Where do you see Jesus in the story?

He is finding respite and rejuvenation in the fellowship of friends and the comfort of their home. How are our homes a place for ministry?

- How was Martha impacted by this exchange?

It reframed her view about the needs and expectations of Jesus. He wanted her presence over any elaborate tray of food she could offer. This exchange would've prompted Martha to think about her internal wiring and how she ordered her priorities, but most of all about how Jesus valued her and desired relationship with her.

- Is it easier to give our neighbors stuff than actually be with them? Is it easier to give them things, rather than time and attention? It's a standard proverb in pastor training that modern churchgoers would rather give their money than their time – why is that?

## Notes

[illegible]



★ DIVINE PARTICIPATION ⌚ 5 mins

Develop some practical action steps to apply the lesson throughout the week.

- What step will you take in this next week to better relate to one of your neighbors?
- Have you considered how your home could be a sanctuary to your neighbors?

**CLOSING PRAYER** 🕒 10 mins

Collect prayer requests from the group and assign prayer partners for the week or have one person send out the list to the group. Discuss praise reports and answers to prayer in this time as well. Then close with a prayer or one of the sample exercises.

## Notes

[illegible]



# 4

## BEING SENT

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## 4: BEING SENT



## WELCOME/ICEBREAKER 15 mins

**SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER** 🕒 1 mins

*Father God, we ask you to give our local, city, and state leaders wisdom in making decisions affecting our neighborhood. We pray they will be thoughtful in their decisions and listen to the voices of the community. We pray for teachers and coaches who influence and shape our children. We pray for courage to stand up for our community and to live with grace and dignity in our city. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



## Luke 10:1-23

[illegible]





## DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE 30 mins



Unpack the scripture in discussion:

We may be familiar with Jesus having 12 followers, and here we see 72 disciples being sent out in his name.

## What do we make of the instructions Jesus gives?

All instructions point to a brief pioneering mission – travel light.

He says to find a “person of peace” – a person who accepts you and your message, a person who can host you and introduce you.

He says to expect that some people will reject you and your message. Shrug it off and don't take it personally.

It appears that these 70 are going ahead to towns and villages that Jesus will visit later.

### What is the purpose of the missionaries?

They are to heal the sick and proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. The people they talk to are to experience the presence and power of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and get ready for the coming of his son the King.

## What kind of report do they bring back to Jesus?

Operating under God's authority, they experienced success more than they imagined – even the demons submitted.

## What does Jesus instruct them to rejoice over?

Verses 19-20 The great triumph is not in your authority over evil, but in God's authority over you and presence with you. It's not what you do for God, but what God does for you—that's the agenda for rejoicing.

## Notes

[illegible]



## How do we view the joy of Jesus over the missionaries?

We see a trinitarian moment where Jesus is exulting in the Holy Spirit and uttering a joyous prayer to the Father. What a reverential, sacred moment that we are invited into!

Jesus is rejoicing in the acceptance of the gospel by ordinary folks. The gospel is for all people, and yet the “know-it-alls” and the “self-sufficient” have a difficult time accepting it.

Jesus is also energized by the exuberance of the 70 disciples.

**? APPLICATION DISCUSSION** **🕒 10 mins**

Give a short summary of what was discussed; then lead to a call to action. Ask the participants to discuss:

- How does this passage apply to us in our time and place?

Are we living as “sent” people? How do the missionary instructions of Jesus fit in our setting?

- As we live as missionaries in our neighborhood, are we aware of operating under the presence, power, and authority of Jesus?

What does this look like for you?

- Much of the ministry you do in your neighborhood will be “being” – being kind, being present, being reliably available. Only some will be “speaking” in an evangelistic sense. How do we balance the two? Are both important?

## Notes

[illegible]



★ DIVINE PARTICIPATION ⌚ 5 mins

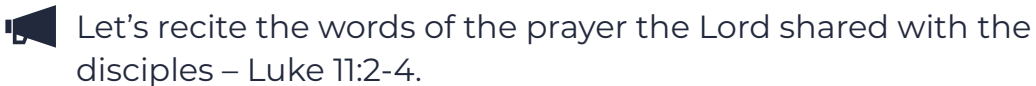
Discuss some practical ways to put this passage into practice during the coming week.

How does this story of Jesus and the 70 missionaries impact how you will be a better neighbor?

## CLOSING PRAYER 🕒 10 mins

Collect prayer requests from the group and assign prayer partners for the week or have one person send the list to the group.

Luke chapter 11 begins with the disciples asking Jesus, "Teach us to pray."



## Notes

[illegible]



# 5

## PLACE SHARING

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## 5: PLACE SHARING



## WELCOME/ICEBREAKER 15 mins

**SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER** ⌚ 1 min**SCRIPTURE READING** ⌚ 1.5 mins

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

[illegible]





## DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE 30 mins



## What motivates us to share life with our neighbor and to introduce them to Jesus?

Verse 14 says that it is the “love of Christ” in me and through me that both fuels and drives me.

## What happened for all of humanity in the work and person of Jesus?

When Christ died, we all died. That is, Jesus died for all humans – those already dead, those alive at the time, and for those yet unborn. His death brought about universal forgiveness and for all humans to become “new creations” in him and experience the life he intended for us.

## How does Jesus view our neighbor?

Because of Jesus' vicarious sacrifice, our neighbor is reconciled to God, and God is not keeping record of his or her sins. New life is extended to our neighbor. In 2 Corinthians 6:1, the urging is for humanity to accept this freely given grace and to live their lives united to Christ.

## How are we as Christ-followers to see our neighbor?

We should not see our neighbors in a “worldly way,” the way we did before we knew Jesus. We must see our neighbor under the spilled blood of Jesus and as a beloved child of God.

## Notes

[illegible]





## Jesus as “One of Us”

**Place-sharing** is the biblical idea of sharing space with a person who is happy, hurting or otherwise, relating to them with the hospitality that Christ related to us by becoming one of us. Rather than seeing someone as a target for evangelism, place-sharing strives to see others as the fully loved people they are in Christ. (Read more about place-sharing [here.](#))

Jesus affirmed and lived out the second great command of the Law, which is to love others with the same care and attention we extend to ourselves. To truly love another person means understanding their personality and background and meeting them at their point of need with unconditional love.

Jesus set a marvelous pattern for how he interacted with people and met their needs. He met Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, on his terms, as “teacher-to-teacher.” He carefully initiated a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well and spoke to her about her culture and religion.

He told meaningful stories to an agrarian audience about planting seeds, tending a vineyard, and shepherding sheep. He was comfortable as a guest at the elaborate parties of the elite Pharisees as well as grilling fish for breakfast with the earthy fishermen he called his friends.

Jesus cried with Martha at the loss of her brother Lazarus, even knowing that he would call him forth from the tomb and back to life. And as Jesus vicariously died for all humanity, he mediated from the cross to the Father on behalf of the crucifiers who mocked him, saying “Father, forgive them, because they don’t know what they are doing.”

## Notes

[illegible]





## APPLICATION DISCUSSION 10 mins

Give a short summary of what was discussed and lead to a call to action. Bring out of the participants:

- Are there other Bible stories where you see Jesus place-sharing with people as a peer or empathizing with them?

The events and exchanges between Peter and Jesus throughout the Gospel accounts paint a vivid picture. Jesus healed lepers and others with ailments that most people, especially teachers and sages, wouldn't get near. The shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) is an example of him sharing a moment of mourning with those who had just lost someone.



## DIVINE PARTICIPATION 5 mins

Discuss some practical action steps to apply this principle during the coming week.

## What might place-sharing with your neighbor look like?

Consider that friendship and relationship will not only be the means of ministry, it will be the ministry itself. Also consider that pointing your neighbor to Jesus, the perfect place-sharer who cares for all our needs, is the role we play as ambassadors for Jesus.

*{This quote, ironically from an atheist,  
could help spark discussion}:  
Don't walk behind me, I may not lead.  
Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow.  
Just walk beside me and be my friend.  
-Albert Camus, French philosopher*

**CLOSING PRAYER** 🕒 10 mins

Collect prayer requests from the group and assign prayer partners for the week, or have one person send the list to the group. Then close with a prayer or one of the sample exercises.

## Notes

[illegible]



# 6

## PARTICIPATING IN CHRIST'S WORK AS A NEIGHBOR

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## 6: PARTICIPATING IN CHRIST'S WORK AS A NEIGHBOR



**WELCOME/ICEBREAKER** 🕒 15 mins

**SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER** 🕒 1 min

*Lord Jesus, you came to this earth and walked the dusty roads shoulder to shoulder with fishermen, tax collectors, and all types of people. You came into villages and entered real people's homes. You sat in living rooms and around dining tables, and gracefully befriended a wide variety of people. As you were the ultimate missionary to humanity, make us ambassadors to our neighbors. Send us in your name, with your authority, and empowered by your love. Amen.*



John 20:19-22

[illegible]





## DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE 30 mins



## What is the emotional state of the disciples on Sunday after their Lord was crucified and killed on Friday?

They are in a “locked” room. There is fear, confusion, and the absence of peace – “Maybe the soldiers are coming for us next!”

## What do we make of the instructions Jesus gives?

The first thing Jesus does is to restore peace. This peace is more than a trouble-free, tranquil feeling; it is the assurance of the enduring presence of Jesus. By the presence of the Spirit there remains a lasting peace that surpasses human understanding.

The Father's sending of the Son is the foundation now for their being sent. The mission of Christ followers is to continue the salvation mission of the Son.

The giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit is paramount. As Jesus breathes the Spirit on them, it is parallel to Genesis 2:7, when the Lord breathed the breath of life into Adam. It is by receiving the Spirit that new life in Christ is actuated, and it is only by the guiding power of the Spirit that the disciples can be able messengers of the gospel.

## Notes

[illegible]





## APPLICATION DISCUSSION 10 mins

Give a short summary of what was discussed.

Ask the participants:

- How does this passage apply to us in our time and place?
- How do we feel about being sent? Is there fear or apprehension? How do we access peace from the Spirit?
- In what ways do you see continuity with the ministry of Jesus?

Whose ministry are we participating in? How is Jesus present with us when we meet our neighbors?



## DIVINE PARTICIPATION 5 mins

Discuss ways to apply this during the coming week.

## How can our small group plan an activity where we engage our neighborhood?

Have we done previous activities or events? What has worked well? What are the needs or interests of the people in this neighborhood?

Make a simple plan with assignments for all participants and set a date to execute your activity.

For planning ideas, check out:

## GCI Church Hacks – [Love Venue Checklist](#)

## Notes

[illegible]



**CLOSING PRAYER** 🕒 10 mins

Collect prayer requests from the group and assign prayer partners for the week or have one person send the list to the group.

Start or close with this prayer:



*Eternal Friend,  
grant me an ease  
to breathe deeply of this moment,  
this light,  
this miracle of now.  
Beneath the din and fury  
of great movements  
and harsh news  
and urgent crises,  
make me attentive still  
to good news,  
to small occasions,  
and the grace of what is possible  
for me to be,  
to do,  
to give,  
to receive,  
that I may miss neither my neighbor's gift  
nor my enemy's need.*

*-From Guerrillas of Grace,  
by Ted Loder*

## Notes

[illegible]