

How to Love
Your
Neighbor

without being weird

AMY LIVELY



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To Bob—
*who represents all my neighbors
who opened their homes to me
and graciously came into mine.*

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Proverbs 31 Ministries, who whispered the words *neighborhood Bible study* into my heart, then taught me how to follow my dreams.

Neighbors who opened their doors, offered a smile, and extended their kindness—even when caught off guard by a stranger at the door.

Jesus Christ, who knew exactly what would happen when we moved into this big, ugly house. Be glorified, Lord, be glorified.

Introduction

I wanted to love my neighbor, but I didn't know how.

I felt guilty about Christ's command to love my neighbor, but I didn't even *know* most of the people living around me. Some of my neighbors were scary (like the ones who named their dog Demon), and some were rude (like the ones who didn't answer the door when I delivered a welcome basket). Sure, most of them were quite nice—but some of them were intimidating, and others were uninteresting.

Trouble was, I couldn't find an exception clause in the second-greatest commandment (trust me, I looked *hard*)—

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:37–39

I had every excuse in the book for not loving my neighbor, and a few I'm sure God had never heard before—but I couldn't find an asterisk or exemption to get me off the hook. After months of arguing with God, I finally knocked on my neighbors' doors and invited them for coffee at my kitchen table.

When it was my neighbors' turn to knock on my door, most of them were as nervous as I was. We learned each other's names, we laughed and talked and shared, and these strangers walked out my door as friends. You'll meet some of them in these pages, although names have been changed to protect their privacy.

I invited my neighbors back for a Bible study, and we've been meeting regularly ever since! I kept notes on what worked well and what failed miserably, how my neighbors responded, and every mistake I made. A ministry called the Neighborhood Café was born, and I've been honored to share my experience with women across the United States and Canada—and even Australia!

I didn't want to be a freak or fanatic. I just wanted to be their friend.

Hosting a neighborhood Bible study might not be your cup of tea, but I bet you can't find an exception clause either. This book will give you tips, tools, and techniques you need to love your neighbor in your own unique way. You'll learn how to maximize your time by offering simple hospitality—not extravagant entertaining—to many neighbors at once. If that sounds about as much fun as a root canal, you'll also discover dozens of ideas to connect with your neighbors perfectly suited for different personalities. You'll be relieved to know there are natural ways to get to know your neighbors without being weird, and you'll overcome fears about sharing your faith and find fulfillment in obeying Christ's #2 command. You can make new friends with women who were once strangers as you form authentic relationships while creating a safe, secure community to live and raise your family.

I speak from the field: I have been there, done that—and lived to tell about it! There's no excuse I haven't had myself. There's no mistake I haven't made. I don't have enough time to do this either. I don't have all the answers. My house could always be cleaner.

Yet when our love for God overflows onto our neighbors, our communities become stronger, our streets are safer, and we'll even live longer. Most important, more people end up in heaven.

And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

2 Corinthians 4:15

In today's culture, it's weird to love your neighbor—but we don't have to be weird doing it. Thank you for being just the right kind of weird with me.

—Amy



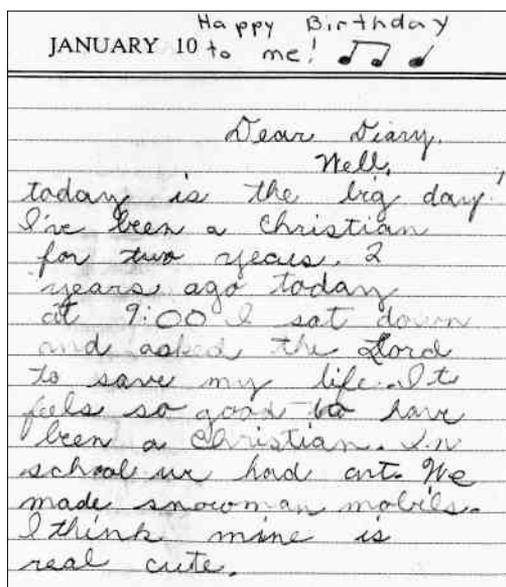
The View From My Window

The contemporary 1960s living room was a far cry from the Catholic cathedral where she attended mass as a child, but my newlywed mother couldn't refuse when her neighbor invited her to a Bible study in her home. Over coffee and cookies, they discussed a book together and memorized a Scripture my mother can still rattle off to this day. While the other women prayed, this shy, pretty girl with a beehive hairdo peeked out through her cat-eye glasses with diamonds on each corner and saw the other women talking to God as if He were real—as if He could really hear them and cared what they had to say.

My father, laid up at home with a broken leg, started reading the only thing he could reach without getting his crutches—my mother's book from Bible study, *The Kneeling Christian*. He read it from back to front, then from front to back. Then he knelt awkwardly on his one good leg and accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Both my parents became Christians the year before I was born. By the time I came along, both my parents loved God with all their hearts. They loved my brother and me. Our family played and prayed together, ate home-cooked meals together, read the Bible together, and went to church together.

My favorite television show when I was a child was *Little House on the Prairie*. When Laura Ingalls bowed her braided pigtails and asked God to forgive her sins, I knelt with my daddy and prayed along with her. My mother, father, and I were baptized together at the same time—a triple dunk! I wrote this in my diary on January 10, 1979:



Happy Birthday to me!

Dear Diary,

Well, today is the big day! I've been a Christian for two years. 2 years ago today at 9:00 I sat down and asked the

Lord to save my life. It feels so good to have been a Christian. In school we had art. We made snowman mobsils [sic]. I think mine is real cute.

Here's another excerpt from my diary at the age of nine—

Dear Diary,

There's something I have to write about. Every night I cry myself to sleep. Every night I feel so bad about it. Every time my mom or dad asks me to do one of them a favor, I make a [sic] ugly face. Joe has been sick at least 5 times this month, and when he's sick he gets all of the attention. It makes me feel so left out or lonely. I've asked God to help me. I know I'm jealous of Joe, but I just can't help it. I told Mom and Dad how I felt, but they sort of ignored me. Things like that are what make me all sad. It makes me want to run away and cry. See ya.

This is my earliest memory of God: He was my Helper when life got tough (and my brother got all the attention), my Confidant who listened to my woes, my Friend who knew me best. I promise, my parents were justified if they ignored my melodramatic whining!

My parents did almost everything right, but I still chose to do almost everything wrong. If I had managed to keep up with that diary for a few more years, it would have read something like this—

Dear Diary,

I am tired of being called goody-two-shoes. I want to be popular. I want to be invited to parties. I want friends to pass me secret notes between classes. But most of all, I want a boyfriend. I want to be accepted and liked. I want to belong.

In high school it didn't "feel so good" to be a Christian anymore. And so from the time I was fifteen until I was thirty-five, I walked away from God. I didn't lose my beliefs, but I lost my faith. I still *believed* the Bible stories I'd been taught, I still *believed* God loved me—I just didn't want anything to do with church or prayer or the actual live-like-you-believe-it stuff.

I was afraid to trust God and believe that His ways were better than the ways of the popular kids I wanted to impress. I was afraid of rejection. I was afraid of being picked on or singled out. I was afraid of being different. I was afraid of being lonely.

I gave in to my fears and my feelings, and walked away from my faith.

My wedding to that boyfriend I so desperately wanted was one of the last times I went to church for a long time, except for occasional holidays to pacify my parents. When they prayed at the start of the service, I prayed it would end! While they worshiped, I wondered what was for dinner. And as they sang all umpteen verses of "Just As I Am," I would harden my heart

once again and say, "Just as I am is perfectly *fine*, thank you very much!"

My parents did almost everything right, but I still chose to do almost everything wrong.

As an adult I avoided church, and I wasn't teaching our daughter my beliefs. My husband and I enrolled Emma at a local Christian school because we thought they offered the best academic curriculum—we were just going

to keep an eye on all that "Jesus stuff." I knew many of the parents and staff from my churchgoing days, and they thought they knew me. I could sling their Christian lingo and stop cussing and smoking long enough to get through a parent-teacher meeting!

Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em

Except for the time I was pregnant and nursing, I smoked for the entire twenty years I was away from God. Is smoking a sin? I don't think so. But I wasn't being very smart, and I certainly wasn't being a good steward of God's creation. Smoking was crippling my body, and it was also crippling my confidence by making me feel unworthy and embarrassed. I hid my smoking from most people, so my habit limited my relationships as I worked my schedule around when and where I was going to sneak my next cigarette.

I loved smoking; I really did. I enjoyed it; smoking was relaxing and pleasurable. My day was synchronized around my smoking—with my morning coffee, after lunch, in the car, before bed. What I didn't enjoy was constantly carrying gum, perfume, and hand sanitizer, being afraid of people stopping by my home unexpectedly, hiding my habit from people, wasting money—and most of all, I hated the example I was setting for my daughter. As she got older, she began to nag me about it. She was getting to be a real drag on my drag.

I gave in to my fears and my feelings, and walked away from my faith.

My Good, Godly Girlfriends

Hanging out at the jungle gym while our kids played after school, the other parents would often ask, "Where do you go to church?" I would reply with a sideways glance, "Oh, we don't have a church home," as if we were pitiful, pious waifs on a desperate search for a house of worship to call our own. In reality, I religiously enjoyed my coffee, crossword puzzle, and cigarettes every Sunday morning.

When they found out we didn't go to church, can you believe not one single person invited me to go to church with her?

Instead, they invited me out for coffee. We worked together on committees and school carnivals. Our children played at each other's homes.

I saw firsthand how these women relied on God to make them good mommies even when their kids behaved badly. I saw how

they responded when they didn't agree with each other. I overheard their heartfelt prayers and realized their beliefs went beyond simple Bible stories.

As we became friends very naturally, I began to soften spiritually.

Like my own sweet momma peeking during prayer, I saw that what they had was real, and their relationship with God made a difference in the way they lived. They had hope

and joy even as they took children to chemotherapy and buried beloved parents. They were content planning fundraisers instead of exotic vacations.

They were simply lovely, and they simply loved me.

As we became friends very naturally, I began to soften spiritually. One day I realized I truly wanted to be the person I was pretending to be around them.

Smoking—one of the harbingers of my rebellion—was also one of the first signs of my renewal. I'll never forget when I made the decision to quit. Walking through the school to pick Emma up from class, I envisioned myself with the cigarette I had just thrown out the window still dangling from my hand (go ahead and add littering to my list of offenses). I thought, *If these people could see me as I really was, I would be mortified and they would be terrified.* Later, I realized this was the Holy Spirit whispering to my soul, revealing a thirst for righteousness I would never have (nor could have) admitted.

I had seen a poster that suggested setting a quit date would be helpful, so I set a date a few weeks out and told a few people (including my daughter!) I was going to quit smoking on October 15. The accountability was nerve-wracking, but it helped me prepare mentally. I didn't want to go from one chemical dependency to another, so I didn't use the patch or gum—I just quit cold turkey . . . and mashed potatoes, with extra gravy, and a candy bar for dessert. Controlling my eating when I quit smoking was very difficult because I craved that hand-to-mouth movement after a meal. Instead of having an after-dinner cigarette, I had an after-dinner *dinner* and just kept eating. The actual average weight gain from quitting smoking is only about five pounds, but I blew that theory out of the water. Later—too late for me!—I read that you should drink a glass of water to satisfy cravings. So, there you have my tips to quit smoking: set a quit date, tell some people, and drink lots of water. Now I'd add lots and lots of prayer—prayers of thanksgiving and prayers for mercy!

I wondered if God would be angry, irritated, or annoyed with me after so many years of ignoring Him. But as I tilted my head ever so slightly toward the Lord's

voice and let one little corner of my heart soften toward Him, I swear I heard Him say, “Oh, Amy—I love you! I've been waiting for you, and I'm so happy you're back!”

As Romans 2:4 says, God was so “wonderfully kind, tolerant and patient” with me. No one lectured me back to church. It wasn't a condemning pamphlet or a churchy program that softened my heart. Instead, God's kindness in sending Jesus Christ as my Savior—and His kindness revealed through the

I swear I heard
Him say, “Oh,
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back!”

people He placed around me—turned me from my sin. God didn't demand that I clean up my act before I came to Him—but He kindly, gently, and sweetly revealed areas where I was making my own rules, then He gave me the desire, wisdom, and strength to submit to Him.

Please take it from this former pagan turned passionate follower—we need each other! We all need someone like Adelle and Donna, Julie and Margaret, Michelle and Marilyn, Luann and Lane—the women whose lives led me back toward the Lord. I call them my good, godly girlfriends—or my gGg's for short.

Natural relationships changed my spiritual destiny. This is why I'm passionate about helping us connect with each other. We need more than an hour of church on Sunday. We need friends around us all day, every day—in the trenches of our

We need fearless women who are brave enough to tell us when we're wrong and wise enough to remind us of God's righteousness.

living rooms and the battleground of the playground. We need fearless women who are brave enough to tell us when we're wrong and wise enough to remind us of God's righteousness.

We need friends who will not always take our side but will always take our hand. They will walk with us side-by-side through the mud and

muck of life's messes and sing praises with us when God straightens things out. They'll gently point out when we're out of line, and offer God's Word as the only way out. They let us moan and complain, but they know when enough is enough. You won't hear their advice on daytime pop psychology shows; they aren't afraid to defy Dr. Phil. Little did I know, but I would need their counsel soon.

Revival Is Reviled

When God used these natural relationships to steer me spiritually, I started going to church and reading my Bible, and I attended several different Bible studies at any church that cracked its doors open. With my smoking behind me, I could spend so much time with other women. It was a joy! But at home . . . not so much. While this was an exciting time of renewal in my relationship with God, it was a time of incredible stress in my relationship with my husband—I mean, this changed *everything!*

If you had peeped inside our picture window, you would have seen a very frustrated wife and a hurting husband in the middle of a terrifying spiritual battle. I cried out to God, “Seriously? This is what I get? I thought following you was supposed to make everything *better!*”

But it wasn’t better. Everything was worse. Our “typical” married fights over money, sex, and parenting were replaced with screaming-at-the-top-of-our-lungs arguments about television evangelists, Bible translations, and how much time I spent at church.

It took many sleepless nights and early morning soul-searching sessions before I realized what was happening: The stakes were too high for the devil to leave us alone. Revival is reviled in Satan’s kingdom. It will always come under attack, and the devil is a ruthless enemy—he attacks us spiritually, relationally, emotionally, financially, and physically.

We almost didn’t make it . . . *almost!* But God redeemed so many mistakes I made in the way I responded and reacted to my husband. He exchanged our broken, bruised, fragile marriage

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for a stronger relationship with Christ at the center. Tougher times lay ahead—in fact, each new phase of my personal faith and ministry has been accompanied by bitter fights, relational trauma, and hurt feelings. I don't think I'll ever get used to it, and I'm rarely thankful *for* it . . . but now I'm thankful *through* these challenges, and I trust God to reign and restore.

We triumphed in round one against Satan's minions, and together we enrolled in ministry school. I soaked up God's Word and fell in love with my first love all over again—and my second love, too.

“She Speaks” – Maybe . . .

One wintry morning as we neared the end of ministry school, loyal dog at my feet and hot coffee in my hand, I sat in my usual spot on my yellow loveseat by my picture window with my Bible and journal and wrote, “I'd like to share what I'm learning with other people.” The journal was soon filled with dozens of different ideas, topics, and verses the Lord and I explored together . . . but I had no idea what to do with this list! Maybe, I thought, I was going to have a very holy dog—she was the only one who ever heard these revelations!

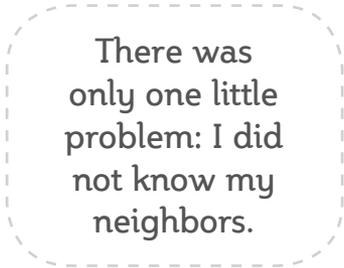
At the top of the page, I wrote a website address for a women's ministry conference called She Speaks. Their website said it was for “women who share a passion to step out with the messages God has placed on our hearts.” I assumed they would step out to *people*, not just pets, so I registered—only to find it was sold out. I was number 250 on the waiting list for a conference that only held 650 people—but God moved a few mountains and I was able to attend!¹

In the days before GPS, my printed Google map directed me to the middle of a North Carolina cornfield. By the time I arrived I was hurried and harried and having a bad hair day. Finally—after months of planning and hours of driving—I took

my seat, took a deep breath, took a look around . . . and burst into tears. What was I doing here? I was alone. I was outclassed. I was underqualified. I was unworthy. It was a waste of money for me to come here. I was in way over my head!

But it was at that conference that one of the speakers uttered three little words that made my heart race—and as soon as I heard her say “neighborhood Bible study,” I knew what I was going to do with that list. For the first time, I could see how God had aligned my revival, my training, my trials, and my passion. I was following hard after Him, I was devouring His Word, I had a heart of compassion toward others, and I was busting to share all He had done in my home.

I returned home from the conference with a plan to invite my neighbors over for coffee and cookies, then lure them back for Bible study! It was going to be called The Rosewood Café because we lived on Rosewood Drive. I opened my journal and drew a little logo, jotted down what I would say on the invitation, and even set the date. There was only one little problem with my plan to start a neighborhood Bible study: I did not know my neighbors.



There was only one little problem: I did not know my neighbors.

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

My husband and I lived in four houses in three states in two years. One of the neighborhoods where we lived was filled with families who had been there for many years—everybody knew everybody else, and quite a bit of their business, too. You couldn't take a walk without someone stopping to ask about your mother or your leaky basement. Another neighborhood was filled with the sounds of children playing while neighbors chatted

in the cul-de-sac. You didn't dare run out to the mailbox without makeup because you were sure to run into a kindly neighbor who would offer to get your groceries while she was out. An-

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other neighborhood was brand-new—no one knew anyone, and everyone walked around shell-shocked as they sorted out this unfamiliar place.

After all that moving around, we finally landed in a home less than one mile from where we started. Our new neighborhood was quiet and peaceful . . . so eerily quiet, in fact, that you could take a long walk on a beautiful Sunday afternoon and not see a single soul. I had been looking out my pic-

ture window for over seven years on the corner of Rosewood and Longwood Drives, yet I knew only a handful of my neighbors. I recognized their cars and their dogs, but not their faces. I didn't know their joys or their pains, I had no one to call to borrow a cup of sugar, and I had never told them about Jesus. He was trapped in my house . . . and I wasn't sure I was ready to let Him out!

I felt guilty about Christ's command to love my neighbors:

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:37–39

This command is reinforced in the New Testament books of Mark, Luke, Romans, Galatians, and James—and they're just quoting the Old Testament book of Leviticus.² I hadn't even *known* my neighbors in some of the places I had lived, let alone *loved* them.

Don't Be Weird

I blazed a twenty-year trail where God never intended me to tread, following my own rules and ignoring Him. He welcomed me back with open arms, healed my hurts, helped me conquer habits and hang-ups, and gave me godly girlfriends. Yet when it came time to return the favor—no, that's impossible, let me say it another way—when it came time to express the fullness of my love for Him by loving my neighbor, I balked.

I was not ready to be “that girl.” I did not want to be weird. I was less concerned about trusting God and more concerned with impressing my neighbors. I was afraid of rejection. I was afraid of being picked on or singled out. I was afraid of being different. I was afraid of being left out and lonely. Sound familiar? I was haunted by the same fears that had followed me all my life. The difference is that when I had these fears as a teen, I went out and mingled with the wrong crowd. As an adult, I kept myself cloistered in Bible studies and church activities—all in the name of holiness. But really, it was fear.

I was not ready to be “that girl.” I did not want to be weird.

My fears emboldened me to argue with God. I asked Him, “*Who* is my neighbor? Don't you count it as ‘loving my neighbor’ when I support a child in Ethiopia with a donation every month? Isn't it ‘loving my neighbor’ when I give to my church and they help missionaries all over the world? By ‘neighbor,’ you mean everyone in the whole wide world, don't you?”

I questioned *how* to love my neighbor. “You didn't really explain exactly what you mean by ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ Do you expect me to spend every weekend grilling out together? Do you want me to walk them down the Roman Road every time they walk down my sidewalk? Can't I just slap a fish bumper

sticker on my minivan, wear Jesus jewelry to the grocery store, and put out yard signs for my church's Easter cantata?"

I cheered for the lawyer who cross-examined Jesus in Luke 10. Oh, he understood Command #1 (love God) and Command #2 (love your neighbor) all right . . . but he wanted to make himself look good. Jesus replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan. You may have heard it—

Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

"By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

"Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'

"Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.

The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy."

Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

Luke 10:30–37

Jesus blew up my definition of *neighbor* with this parable. The Jews defined the Greek word *plēsion* (play-SEE-on) as neighbor or friend, but they lived in tight-knit communities with only their fellow Hebrews. To the Jews, "love your neighbor *as yourself*" meant "love your neighbor *who is just like you.*" I only knew a few of my neighbors, and—permission to speak

honestly, please?—some of them were a little annoying. Surely loving my neighbor didn't include the ones with barking dogs and loud parties! I related to the Jews on this one: I wanted to love my neighbors whose houses looked like mine, whose families acted like mine, the ones who carried little doggie litter bags when they walked in front of my house. It's easy to love *those* neighbors!

I wanted to love my neighbors whose houses looked like mine, whose families acted like mine, the ones who carried little doggie litter bags when they walked in front of my house. It's easy to love **those** neighbors!

These two men could not have been more different. Had he not been a beaten, bloodied, and bruised mess, the Jewish man likely would have spit in the face of the Samaritan who helped him. Jews hated Samaritans; they considered them unclean and uncouth. Yet Jesus united these two mortal enemies through a crisis, compassion, and caregiving. The Samaritan was moved to action. He used his own resources to soothe and bandage his new friend. He walked the dusty road while holding the Jewish man steady on his own donkey. He spent the night by his side, tending his wounds, soothing his cries. He invested time and money and made a commitment to a long-term relationship. He showed mercy—the Greek word is *eleos* (ELL-ee-oss), “kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them.”³

Jesus defined *neighbor* as anyone and everyone—regardless of their nationality or religion—with whom we live or whom we have the chance to meet. The Vulgate, a Latin translation of the Bible, uses the word *proximus* for neighbor. It means

“the nearest person or thing.” It shares the same root as *proximity* and *approximate*. I, on the other hand, had globalized the definition of *neighbor* to include everyone in the whole wide world, conveniently excluding the people who live right next door.

Did Jesus want me to love the women in *my* neighborhood, the ones who could reject me? Right to my face?

I would rather go to Africa than go across the street.

After months of debate (read: disobedience) about this crazy neighborhood Bible study idea, I invited my neighbors over for coffee. At first, I was afraid and intimidated. It felt awkward. It wasn't always easy. But now? Since I've met Juanita and Linda, Mary Ann and Mary Sharon, Bonnie and Lauren? And since my neighbors sat together in my living room last night and talked and laughed and cried and prayed?

Oh, yeah—the reward was worth the risk.

In the years since that first coffee klatch, I've knocked on my neighbors' doors hundreds of times. Every time I invite my neighbors over for coffee, I make a new mistake. Sometimes I wait too long to send the invitation, sometimes I send it too early. I forget my neighbors' names. I don't have enough food, or I get so distracted that I don't enjoy my guests. I forget to follow up with a hurting friend, or I'm lax to thank someone for coming.

I would rather go to Africa than go across the street.

Every time I engage with my neighbors, I learn something new. This book is a candid compilation of my own mistakes while giving glory to God for any success. It's also the story of others across the country who have marched down their sidewalks, raised quivering hands to knock on their neighbors' doors, and returned home with the names of new friends.

And that's how we roll on Rosewood Drive.

Five Minutes of Obedience

People who know me today are surprised by my stories—“I can’t believe you smoked!” they exclaim when they meet me at my job in a church. When they hear me speak about friendships that now dot my neighborhood, they say, “I can’t believe you didn’t know your neighbors!” And my personal favorite, “I can’t believe you fight with your husband!”

I had no idea that quitting smoking was the start of my journey back to God. The first time I cracked open my dusty Bible, I had no idea its words would transform my life. When I sat myself down in a pew and it wasn’t Christmas or Easter, I had no idea I would eventually be on staff at a church. The first time my husband and I held hands to pray together, I had no idea these prayers could literally hold us together. All I knew was that these were the next best steps I needed to take personally. I had no idea that inviting Jesus into my life would impact my marriage and my daughter and my neighborhood and my church—and eventually people all over the country would hear about Christ’s incredible mercy on me. No idea! If I did, I probably would have been scared to death. But it happened very gradually, very naturally. It wasn’t weird.

God has an irritating habit of pulling me out of my comfort zone and into His Kingdom come. Is there something today that God has asked you to do, some little step of obedience that you are resisting or struggling against? I struggled too! Maybe He’s nudging you to stop an unhealthy habit or start something new. Maybe He’s challenging you to take a class, start a conversation, make amends, or memorize a verse. I know He’s already asked you to love your neighbor.

I encourage you to take that terrifying first step.

You may look back in nine days or nine months or nine years and say, “Wow! I can’t believe *this* is what God had in store for me!” His plan for your life and for your personal ministry in

your home, on your street, at your job, or in your church doesn't unfold all at once. Each morning the sun comes up gradually, each sunset fades slowly, each step is taken incrementally one at a time. Oswald Chambers said, "If you obey God in the first thing He shows you, then He instantly opens up the next truth to you. You could read volumes on the work of the Holy Spirit, when five minutes of total, uncompromising obedience would make things as clear as sunlight."⁴

You can trust God to hold your hand as you take your next best steps. You can trust that His plan is good. His way can be tough. It is not the path of least resistance . . . but it is the path of best results!

Your neighbors are in crisis. They are by the side of the road—your road, in your neighborhood. Will you walk on by? Or will you be moved with compassion? Will you stop? Will you care?

Next Best Steps



1. Have you ever pretended to be someone you're not? When we get tired of our charade, there are three options: blow your cover, bow out, or become who you're pretending to be. Which did you do?
2. Who are your gGg's? Plan a special time to get together so you can tell them how much they've meant to you, or send a handwritten card of appreciation. If you don't have a good, godly girlfriend, ask God to bring someone special into your life.
3. Have you ever experienced a setback just as you were stepping into a new phase of your faith? How did you get through this trying time? Who helped you? Did your faith become stronger or was it undermined? When it happens again, how will you respond?

The View From My Window

4. What is the view from your window? Describe the relationships you have in your neighborhood. Do you know your neighbors? Have you ever had a spiritual conversation with a neighbor?
5. Where is God asking you for “five minutes of total, uncompromising obedience”? Have you been arguing and debating with Him about anything He is nudging you to do? Recall a time you obeyed God first and asked questions later. How does obedience make things clear?