



small groups

Discussion Guide



BE With Our Neighbors

1 Peter 2:11-17

Ice Breaker

(5 minutes)

Describe the neighborhood where you lived growing up. Were there any neighborhood kids you remember?

Lesson Review

(40 minutes)

Barry started with a literary reference. The character Mrs. Jellyby from Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* practices a "telescopic philanthropy." She pursues distant projects at the expense of her duty to her own family.

Following Barry's lead, here's another literary reference:

"The more I love humanity in general the less I love man in particular. In my dreams, I often make plans for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually face crucifixion if it were suddenly necessary. Yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together. I

know from experience. As soon as anyone is near me, his personality disturbs me and restricts my freedom. In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men: one because he's too long over his dinner, another because he has a cold and keeps on blowing his nose. I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me. But it has always happened that the more I hate men individually the more I love humanity."

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Discuss

IBC is a very missional place, and our mission includes efforts to proclaim the gospel "across the street and around the world" as Pastor Andy likes to say.

- To which do you feel most called — across the street or around the world?
- Do you think IBC focuses too much on one kind of mission?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17

Peter wrote this letter to ancient churches who were facing a culture that was increasingly inhospitable to their way of life. Peter called his audience "foreigners and exiles." Barry read the following quote to illustrate the experience of Old Testament exiles that modern Christians may find familiar.

"The exiles experienced a loss of the structured, reliable world which gave them meaning and coherence, and they found themselves in a context where their most treasured and trusted symbols of faith were mocked, trivialized, or dismissed."

—Walter Brueggemann

Peter also infers this in the next chapter when he makes reference to punishment for doing good. Like the exiles and the ancient church, modern American Christians face a culture that increasingly misunderstands our morality.

Read 1 Pet. 3:13-17

Discuss

- Do you feel that the most treasured and trusted symbols of our faith are being mocked, trivialized, or dismissed? How?
- Barry said, "Fear sells" and pointed out Peter's command "Do not be frightened" in Chapter 3. Who is selling you fear?

Barry explained that this passage in Peter's letter warns Christians against two unhelpful reactions to an inhospitable culture: syncretism and culture war.

Syncretism is the practice of assimilating into the culture and therefore disobeying the Biblical mandate to live as “called out ones.” Barry used Peter’s own actions as an example of this. (Read Luke 22:54-62)

Culture War is the attempt to militate against inhospitable cultural elements. Again, Barry used Peter’s own actions as an example. (Read John 18:10)

Make two columns on a piece of paper and title them “Syncretism” and “Culture War”. Then reread 1 Peter 2:11-17, and put each verse into one of those columns: does the verse warn against syncretism or against culture war?

There’s a third category of response to an inhospitable culture: isolation. This is the practice of retreating from the culture and living in a “Christian bubble.” Barry asked us to circle the words “among” and “see” in 1 Peter 2:12 to highlight the idea that our lives must be visible to unbelievers. Barry told about his own family’s friendship with neighbors and the way one neighbor boy is teaching his sons "new words."

Discuss

- **Parents:** How does this make you feel about your own kids and the influence of peers on them?
 - **If you’re not a parent:** Who are the unbelievers who can “see” your life of faith?
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Application

(15 minutes)

Discuss

The tic-tac-toe grid Barry showed has come to be called “The Grid of Shame” by some missiologists, but that’s not the way we want to talk about it at IBC. This is an opportunity to grow, not to beat ourselves up. So, without shame, see if you can fill in the grid for your own neighborhood.

- Can you name the eight families who live closest to you?
- Then identify one person or family on the grid you would like to get to know better.
- Then identify one step you can take to move them from strangers to acquaintances to relationships.

