



40



Days of Joining God in the
Neighbourhood



WELCOME TO 40 DAYS OF JOINING GOD IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

What is Joining God in the Neighbourhood¹?

Joining God in the Neighbourhood is about getting into our neighbourhood and learning to see it in a whole new way. Over the next 6 weeks we'll be doing simple experiments of entering the neighbourhood so that we can listen, observe, pray and discern what God may be doing there and how we can join Him.

It's common for Christians to assume that God is only present in the church and that He only works through "church programs". But what if God is already present and active in our communities? What if God has gone before us into our workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods preparing people's hearts and minds to be receptive to the gospel? What if He is waiting for us to join Him in the work He has already begun?

In Jesus' day, people believed that God's presence could only be found in the Temple. But when Jesus came, the Bible describes something radical and revolutionary... *The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.* (John 1:14, *The Message*)

You see, in Jesus, God comes into the world through the ordinary and everyday moments of life. And now through His Spirit, Jesus is continuing His work in neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, etc. to restore the world to His good purposes – "putting love where love is not". In fact, Jesus is looking for people who will join Him in this mission!

HERE'S A LOOK AHEAD TO OUR WEEKLY EXPERIMENTS...

- Week 1:** The "People-Watcher" Experiment
- Week 2:** The Foodie Experiment
- Week 3:** The Map Experiment
- Week 4:** The Research Experiment
- Week 5:** The Conversation Experiment or "My Favourite Neighbourhood" Experiment
- Week 6:** Final Reflections

¹ Some of these ideas have been inspired and adapted by Alan Roxburgh's book *Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood* as well as his workbook *Moving Back into the Neighbourhood*.



GETTING STARTED

Step 1: Pick your focus neighbourhood

Cornerstone Centre will be located in the Greensborough community, in north-east Markham. It is our vision to bless the people, families, businesses and schools here in the name of Jesus.

Greensborough Community



Our suggestion is to choose Greensborough as your focus neighbourhood for the next 40 days. This would be where you would go for prayer walks, engage with the people and do the weekly experiments.

However, we also recognize that this may not be feasible for some of you. So we encourage you to choose a focus neighbourhood you will commit to engaging. This may be where you live, where you work or where you play. The important thing is that you engage a neighbourhood and ask God to show you what He's doing there.

My focus neighbourhood is: _____

Step 2: Assume an open posture

God is already at work in people's lives and in the community but often, we fail to notice. As you enter into your focus neighbourhood, assume an open posture. Open your eyes, ears and heart to where Jesus may already be working.

You may get a sense of this through your observations during walks, through conversations you have with people, through personal reflection and prayer, through comparing notes with Cornerstone folks and also through promptings God may whisper in your spirit.

These are some questions that can help you to be open to God:

- Jesus, where are you stirring up spiritual hunger in people's lives (John 3:1-17)?
- Are there people who are broken and hurting and looking for a better way (John 4:1-42)?
- Where are people working for causes that reflect God's character and kingdom, eg. working with the poor, ending racial discrimination, helping immigrants, etc.? (Micah 6:8, James 2:14-17, Matthew 25:31-46).
- What signs are there that wholesome expressions of creativity and the arts are being celebrated (Exodus 31:1-6)?
- Where are people caring for and protecting creation, eg. park clean-ups, tree planting, etc. (Genesis 1:26-31, 2:15)?
- Lord, what do you want me to see? Who do you want me to notice? What are the things you care about?



Step 3: Do the weekly experiments in this guide

In this guide, you will find 6 weekly experiments. These experiments are designed to be a fun way to engage your focus neighbourhood and reflect on what you're learning. Take the time to do these experiments. Write down your thoughts. Share your experiences with others.

General Tips & Ideas for 40 Days of Joining God in the Neighbourhood

During the next 40 days, you will be entering the neighbourhood together with Jesus. Invite Jesus to come along with you on your walks and in your experiments. Talk to Him about what you see. Ask Him what He thinks or how He feels about things. If it helps, see Him in your mind's eye right next to you as you walk, observe the neighbourhood and talk with others.

Here are some ideas for you to consider. Pick the ones that resonate with you or come up with your own:

- **Get into your focus neighbourhood (with Jesus).**
 - ▶ **Go for walks.** Make a habit of getting into the neighbourhood. Go out with your family, walk your dog. Be intentional about saying hello to people you don't know.
 - ▶ **Be a regular.** Instead of driving all over the city for coffee, eating out, groceries, haircuts, etc., go to the same places. Get to know the staff. Meet up with friends, have your small group meetings there.
 - ▶ **Hobby with others.** Are there hobbies you can do with your friends and with others in the neighbourhood? How about participating in a community scrapbooking event or a running/cycling group?
 - ▶ **Participate in community events.** Look into community events like fundraisers, festivals, concerts, etc. that you and your family could participate in.
 - ▶ **Serve your neighbours.** Are there opportunities to help out a neighbour by weeding, mowing, moving, fixing something... ?

- **Do it with others.** Try these experiments together as a family or small group. Sign-up for our Joining God in the Neighbourhood Learning Lab. Talk to others about what you're learning.
- **Participate in our Joining God in the Neighbourhood Community Events.**
 - ▶ Monday May 20 – Serving a meal and meeting the poor (Good Neighbour's Club)
 - ▶ Thursday June 6 – Interact with the parents and kids of Greensborough P.S. (Diversity Fun Fair)
 - ▶ Sunday June 9 – Prayer Walk and Park Clean-up Event (Greensborough community)
- **Pray.** Pray for the community during your walks. Bless the people you meet. Pray that God would increase your love for your community and the people there. Be a "Jesus-Whisperer"; whisper "Jesus" on your walks, as you walk around or talk with people. Ask Jesus: What are you showing me about my neighbourhood? Where are you already working? Pray the "breath prayers" provided with each of the weekly experiments.
- **Write down your observations.** In the blank pages provided in this guide, write down the things you are observing and learning. What is Jesus showing you about the community? About the people? About yourself? About God? What questions are emerging for you through this experiment?
- **Take pictures.** Use a camera or phone to take pictures of people and places in your neighbourhood. If you're artistically inclined, choose a favourite spot and paint or sketch a scene that captures something about the neighbourhood. What do you see in these pictures? Where might God be working?
- **Participate in our Joining God blog!** Visit <http://joininggod.blogspot.ca> to see what other Cornerstone folks are learning in the weekly experiments. Share your own experiences here as well.



Let's go!

So are you ready? Excited? Nervous? Both? Coming out of our comfort zones can feel like that. It's an opportunity to see new places and meet new people. It's an opportunity for new learning and developing new perspectives. It's an opportunity to draw nearer to Jesus who was sent into the world for mission by his Father and is now sending us out into our neighbourhood as well (John 20:21)!

*May you be the eyes and ears,
the hands and feet of Christ as you enter
into the neighbourhood.*

*May God fill you with his love and vision
for the neighbourhood and for the people
He loves so much (John 3:16).*

*May we together be God's agents of change
to bring His kingdom of love here on earth
(as it is in heaven).*

*God bless you as you begin this
40-day adventure!*

THE EXPERIMENTS



Week 1: The "People-Watcher" Experiment

If you want to discover and discern what God is up to in the world... stop trying to answer this question from within the walls of your churches.²

An ethnographer is someone who gathers and records information about people and cultures by observing them. Be an ethnographer this week. As you make a habit of walking around your neighbourhood, be a "people-watcher" and notice the people around you.

- What kind of people make up the community? (Consider cultures, ages, family-types, etc.)
- How do these people shape the neighbourhood?
- Who drops off/picks up children to/from school (eg. mother, father, both, nanny, grandparents, after school programs)?
- Who do you see waiting at bus stops, train stations, etc.?
- How do people get to work?
- Where do people hang out?
- What do people do for fun and recreation?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Write down your observations in the blank pages provided in this guide.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pray for your focus neighbourhood.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Talk to someone about what you're learning.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Breath Prayer: "Jesus, help me see people through your eyes."

² Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood*, p. 134.



Week 2: The Foodie Experiment

Jesus' work is about being sent out, about leaving places of familiarity, control and security.³

Identify one or two neighbourhood food establishments you can check out this week. Avoid the major chain franchises and try to find the smaller local establishments. Try something different you might not normally order. Talk to the staff there. (For some sample questions, refer to the Week 5 Conversation Experiment.)

- Was the restaurant busy? What kind of people frequent this place? If you can, go together with a friend from church.
- How would you describe the food (eg spices, flavours, etc.)?
- What culture/country does the restaurant represent?
- How was the hospitality you experienced?
- Was there anything you learned from your conversations with the staff?
- How do the food and the people reflect your neighbourhood?

- Write down your observations in the blank pages provided in this guide.
- Pray for your focus neighbourhood.
- Talk to someone about what you're learning.
- Breath Prayer: "Lord, may the people of this neighbourhood taste and see that you are good (Is. 34:8)."

³ Roxburgh, *Missional*, 155.



Week 3: The Map Experiment

The primary way to know what God is up to in our world... is by entering into the ordinary, everyday life of the neighbourhoods and communities where we live.⁴

Imagine you're sitting in a helicopter looking down at your neighbourhood. Draw a sketch of what you would see.

- What's at the centre of your neighbourhood?
- Mark the shopping places, parks, schools, etc.
- What other landmarks are there?
- Where are the gathering places?
- Where is your favourite place to go? Why is it your favourite?
- Where is your least favourite place to go? Why is it your least favourite?

- Sketch out your community map in the blank pages provided.
- Pray for your focus neighbourhood.. Are there places you feel God wants you to pray for? Jot down prayers n the back of this booklet as the Lord impresses.
- Talk to someone about what you're learning.
- Memory Verse: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city... Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jer 29:7)

⁴ Roxburgh, *Missional*, 133.



Week 4: The Research Experiment

Here is the... loss: while returning to [church] meetings and thinking of them as our Christianity, we ignore the authentic communities we are already in! We neglect the very places we could be working with God as ambassadors of the Kingdom.⁵

This week, try to learn more about your neighbourhood by doing a little research.

- Read through an issue of the Markham Economist & Sun. (Or another publication relevant to your focus neighbourhood.)
- Surf community and school websites, blogs, etc.
 - ▶ www.markham.ca
 - ▶ www.mygreensborough.com
 - ▶ www.greensborough.ps.yrdsb.edu.on.ca
 - ▶ www.cornellvillage.ca
 - ▶ www.mycornell.ca

What is Jesus showing you about your neighbourhood?

- What issues are important for the people in the community?
- How are these being expressed?
- Who speaks for the community? What are they saying?
- Is there anyone who doesn't have a voice?
- What resources does the neighbourhood have? What resources are needed?
- Are there individuals or organizations that seem well-connected in the community? Who are they? What do they do?
- What are the primary organizations and services? Does this tell us anything about the community?
- What strengths and values do you see in the community?

- Write down your observations in the blank pages provided in this guide.
- Pray for your focus neighbourhood.
- Talk to someone about what you're learning.
- Breath Prayer: "Lord, what do you want to show me (about this neighbourhood)?"

⁵ March 2003 <www.toddhunter.org>.



Week 5: The Conversation Experiment (Option 1)

Where is the [New Testament] church...? It is not in a building filled with people just like us... It's in the homes of people... outside of those meetings. It's sitting at their tables, listening to their stories, breaking bread with them and entering into a human dialogue that is not a well-rehearsed sales pitch. This is the location of the church - in the public space.⁶

This week see if you can begin a conversation with someone in the neighbourhood. This could be a neighbour or someone you've gotten to know from your walks or visiting a coffee shop or someone you meet. Casually begin by asking a few questions and see where the conversation goes. Picture Jesus there right with you as you talk to this person.

Here are some questions you can ask. (They're not meant to be a "checklist" but some helpful cues that can get you talking about the neighbourhood.)

- How long have you been living/working in this neighbourhood?
- What brought you here?
- What do you like about this area?
- What would you love to see happen in this community?

- Write down your comments and learnings in the blank pages provided in this guide.
- Pray for your focus neighbourhood.
- Talk to someone about what you're learning.
- Breath Prayer: "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." (1 Sam. 3:10)

⁶ Roxburgh, *Missional*, 146.



Week 5: "My Favourite Neighbourhood" Experiment (Option 2)

Our call to mission is a call to discern, embody and proclaim the presence of God where we are. It's a call to neighbourhood.⁷

Think back to the various neighbourhoods you've lived in. Which one would you say was your favourite?

- What were your relationships with your neighbours like? How were these cultivated?
- What kind of activities and events in the neighbourhood did you participate in?
- What was the community spirit in your neighbourhood like? What contributed to it?
- What are some ways you were a "good neighbour"?
- What are some ways others were "good neighbours" to you?



Write down your comments and learnings in the blank pages provided in this guide.



Pray for your focus neighbourhood.



Talk to someone about what you're learning.



Daily Scripture Reflection: Luke 10:25-37.

Breath Prayer: "Lord, show me who my neighbour is."



Week 6: Final Reflections

The first steps towards the renewal of a place can be in considering and celebrating what is distinctive about it.⁸

Our hope is that even as this 40-day initiative comes to an end, you've come to see your neighbourhood in a fresh way and will continue pursuing what God may be calling you and us to do.

What are some things Jesus has shown you from your experience of **Joining God in the Neighbourhood**?

- What kinds of things are you noticing in your neighbourhood that you've never noticed before?
- What are you learning about your neighbourhood?
- What image or metaphor would you use to describe your community?
- What questions are emerging for you?
- Where do you see Jesus working in the neighbourhood?
- What are 3 things you could do to bless your neighbourhood?



Write down your comments and learnings in the blank pages provided in this guide.



Pray for your focus neighbourhood.



Talk to someone about what you're learning.



Breath Prayer: "Bless us/me Lord, that we/I might be a blessing in this neighbourhood."

⁷ Simon Carey Holt, *God Next Door* (Melbourne: Acorn Books, 2005), p. 63.

⁸ John Davies, *Reading the Everyday*, Third Way, October 2006, 13.



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