

Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood
Companion Guide:
A Six-Week Group Prayer and
Ministry Experience

INTRODUCTION

In 1982, my wife, Barbara, and I went to Central America as missionaries. Quite quickly, prayer walking became an important part of our ministry. We prayed over neighborhoods where we wanted to plant churches. We would walk through neighborhoods and pray with those we met. Sometimes I went door-to-door with church planters-in-training and we would offer to pray for whoever opened the door—we almost always found a receptive audience. Most fascinating to me is that every property we ever acquired came in direct answer to prayer.

We have continued the practice over the years—sometimes more formally, sometimes more casually—and we have continued to see fruit from this practice.

In 2015, we launched North County Project here in North Orange County and knew prayer needed to be a key component of the ministry. We mapped out the region into two-mile prayer routes and invited people to adopt a route. Our vision? To see all of North OC covered in prayer on a weekly basis. The commitment? Walk the route once each week, pray for neighbors and businesses as God leads, and see what would happen.

Reports started coming back. People came to Christ, marriages were restored, and a few people experienced healing. Beyond that, participants told us their own hearts for God and their neighbors grew enormously.

We have continued with that ministry but we've noticed a couple of challenges. First, two miles is a bit long for many people. Second, people are most interested in praying for their immediate neighbors. Hence, this prayer guide.

INTRODUCTION

Our vision remains to see all of North OC covered in prayer but instead of two-mile routes, we are inviting believers to adopt their own block/neighborhood. The authors of *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* created the perfect guide for anyone who wants to do this. The booklet in your hands is simply an additional help to walk your Life Group through the process as you become familiar with the book.

I would like to emphasize that the goal during these five weeks is prayer; not discussing prayer, but actually coming together to pray as the primary part of your group time. If you have never spent a half-hour in group prayer before, you may find it helpful to do the following:

- Journal prayers for your neighbors during the week and pray those prayers when you come together.
- Invite God to show you how to pray for your neighbors and spend a few minutes listening before you start praying together.
- Select a passage of Scripture that gives you some good ideas on how to pray for your neighbors (i.e. Colossians 1:9-14).
- Spend a few minutes praying for each of the neighborhoods represented in your group.
- Use the Prayer Starters and Prayer BLESSINGS from the *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* weekly reading to guide you.

My prayer is that you will find as much adventure and joy in prayer walking as Barb and I (and many others) have. If you have any questions, feel free to write me at alan@northcountyproject.org.

His/yours,
Alan Amavisca



A SIX-WEEK EXPERIENCE IN PRAYER MINISTRY

A Life Group exercise to be used with the book, *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood*,
by Alvin VanderGriend

Introduction:

For this journey in intercessory prayer for your neighborhood and community, you will need a copy of “Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood,” this group guide in your hand, and a journal or small notebook.

In your **Week 1 Group Meeting**, you will:

- Hand out Be Jesus In Your Neighborhood to every member of the group (or ask them to purchase it online – available on Amazon).
- Read and discuss the Introduction on page 1 in your group.
- Have each group member describe their neighborhood briefly.
- Ask group members to list as many of their neighbors as they know by name (as well as any needs). Over the next five weeks, have them “fill in the blanks” in the spaces below if they don’t already know all of their neighbors in the eight homes around them. Start with the two neighbors on each side of their home and the four neighbors across the street.

Neighbor 1	Neighbor 2	Neighbor 3	Neighbor 4
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Neighbor 5	Neighbor 6	Your House	Neighbor 7	Neighbor 8
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- Ask everyone to name their greatest fear about this endeavor. Spend time praying over each other and the fear(s) each one carries. Use the “Sample Agenda for Group Prayer Time” on page 3 as a guide.

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Before Your Week 2 Group Meeting:

- Encourage each member to select a 30-minute segment in the day to read the daily selection from *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* and pray as recommended for the next 30 days. (NOTE: This will also be the time to journal any thoughts, leadings, or insights from your prayer time, from the book, or from the Bible passage).
- Encourage each member to commit to reading and praying through DAYS 1-3 before your next meeting (e.g., if your group meets on Wednesday, you would all read “DAY 1” on Monday and “DAY 2” on Tuesday. On Wednesday, you will all have read “DAY 3” before you meet.)

WEEK 2 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Group Discussion Questions for Each Week:

- What new Biblical insight from Days 1-3 did you discover about prayer this week as you read *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* and prayed?
- What did you learn about your neighbors or neighborhood as you prayed? How has that changed your own prayers and your heart for your neighbors?
- Did you have any stories, struggles, challenges, or God-moments in your prayer times or neighborhood interactions this week?
- How can we pray for you this week—any plans you have to connect with a neighbor, any fears you are battling, any burdens you have for anyone in particular on your street?
- Encourage group members to share any ideas they might have for the coming week: e.g., to “fill in” any missing names on their neighborhood diagram or to act on anything they learned from the first three days of praying.

Group Prayer Time Sample Agenda

- 5 minutes: Sing a worship song together or, if you prefer, play a worship song and listen. Use the time to settle your heart and let go of the day’s distractions.
- 5 minutes: Use the Prayer Starter prompts to begin your time together.
- 10 minutes: Each person/couple prays for their own neighborhood and the requests/needs they have identified.
- 5 minutes: Pray for other needs that affect your neighborhoods: local school staff, city officials, community influencers that don’t know Jesus yet.
- 5 minutes: Worship God in prayer

WEEK 2 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Week 2 Action Step – “Prayer Walking”

- The facilitator should then point out Week 2 Action Step – “Prayer Walking.” Review the contents with the group and ask each one to commit to prayer walking their neighborhood for the next seven days. (Those with limited mobility may want to try praying on their porch or find an alternative way to be “out there.”)
- Ask each one to determine their prayer route. Encourage them to continue reading the book at home each day and also prayer walk their route daily.
- Spend some time praying for each other.
- This coming week, continue to read and pray through Days 4-10 in *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood*.

WEEK 2 ACTION STEP

Prayer Walking

*“Seek the peace of the city...and pray to the LORD for it;
for in its peace, you will have peace.”*

--Jeremiah 29.7

Preparation:

“As you pray, you will find that God opens your eyes and prepares your heart to see the city from His perspective. Your Sorrow may deepen for the plight of the city while your hope grows for what God desires and is able to do through your prayers.” - Breakthrough Prayer Ministry

Prepare your mind and heart. Take time to confess and repent, to release any unforgiveness, to center your mind on Jesus.

Pray for leading and insight from the Holy Spirit—that He will teach you how to pray.

Prayer is spiritual warfare so spend a few minutes praying words of praise and prayers of declaration (who are WE in Christ?).

As you go:

If you go with another, pray together before you head out. Keep your eyes open—it’s okay! It is good to agree with one another in your prayer and to build on each other’s prayers.

Some ideas on how to pray:

- Pray for discernment so you can see what God sees:
 - Look for signs of change in the community
 - Look for evidence of God at work: churches, Christian signs, messages of encouragement: pray for them
 - Look for evidence of need: poverty, disorder, messages antagonistic to God, social evil, tagging by gangs
 - Pray over homes that indicate Christians, pray for families who indicate they belong to a false sect, another religion—pray their longing for God is met in Jesus.

WEEK 2 ACTION STEP

Prayer Walking

- Pray from Scripture as God brings it to mind
- If anyone asks what you are up to, tell them you are praying God's blessing over this neighborhood. Then you can ask them, "Is there anything specific we can pray for you?"

After you finish:

- Pairs or groups: take a few minutes to share what you have learned or seen or where you see God at work. Luke 10:17
- Individuals: write down any impressions or insights you get while walking and praying

Next time:

- Walk in the opposite direction to get a different perspective of your route
- Try walking at different times of the day in order to see what is going on and to possibly meet people who are hanging out in the area
- If your neighborhood has a social gathering place, a park, or a coffee house, consider stopping to observe. Watch what is going on and pray for what you see. God may also prompt you to pray for specific people quietly or with them.

WEEK 3 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Group Discussion Questions for Each Week:

- What new Biblical insight from Days 4-10 did you discover about prayer this week as you read *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* and prayed?
- What did you learn about your neighbors or neighborhood as you prayed (and prayer walked)? How has that changed your own prayers and your heart for your neighbors?
- Did you have any stories, struggles, challenges, or God-moments in your prayer times or neighborhood interactions this week?
- How can we pray for you this week—any plans you have to connect with a neighbor, any fears you are battling, any burdens you have for anyone in particular on your street?
- Encourage group members to share any ideas they might have for the coming week: e.g., to “fill in” any missing names on their neighborhood diagram or to act on anything they learned from praying this last week.

Group Prayer Time Sample Agenda:

- 5 minutes: Sing a worship song together or, if you prefer, play a worship song and listen. Use the time to settle your heart and let go of the day’s distractions.
- 5 minutes: Use the Prayer Starter prompts to begin your time together.
- 10 minutes: Each person/couple prays for their own neighborhood and the requests/needs they have identified.
- 5 minutes: Pray for other needs that affect your neighborhoods: local school staff, city officials, community influencers that don’t know Jesus yet.
- 5 minutes: Worship God in prayer

WEEK 3 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Week 3 Action Step – “An Invitation”

- The facilitator should then point out Week 3 Action Step – “An Invitation.” Review the invitation with the group and see who wants to distribute the invitation to their neighborhood—or at least to some of their neighbors.
- Spend some time praying for each other.
- This coming week, continue to read and pray through Days 11-17 in *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood*.

WEEK 3 ACTION STEP

An Invitation

Make a card to pass out to your neighbors. Keep it simple. The following is merely a sample idea:

Dear Neighbor,

We are praying for you and your household—and for our neighborhood. We are praying for God on your behalf for things like health, employment, schooling, joy, peace, family harmony, relationships, and spiritual blessings.

If there is some specific way we can pray for you or for someone you care about, we would love to do that! Please feel free to contact us and share your request.

Your praying friend: _____

Where you can find us: _____

Where you can reach us: Phone: _____

Email: _____

You may want to limit yourself to ten homes or so to see how many respond. The response can vary significantly from neighborhood to neighborhood and you don't want to inundate yourself! The number of responders will help you determine how many to pass out in the next round.

WEEK 4 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Group Discussion Questions for Each Week:

- What new Biblical insight from Days 11-17 did you discover about prayer this week as you read *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* and prayed?
- What did you learn about your neighbors or neighborhood as you prayed and passed out the prayer invitation cards? How has that changed your own prayers and your heart for your neighbors?
- Did you have any stories, struggles, challenges, or God-moments in your prayer times or neighborhood interactions this week?
- How can we pray for you this week—any plans you have to connect with a neighbor, any fears you are battling, any burdens you have for anyone in particular on your street?
- Encourage group members to share any ideas they might have for the coming week: e.g., to “fill in” any missing names on their neighborhood diagram or to act on anything they learned from praying this last week.

Group Prayer Time Sample Agenda

- 5 minutes: Sing a worship song together or, if you prefer, play a worship song and listen. Use the time to settle your heart and let go of the day’s distractions.
- 5 minutes: Use the Prayer Starter prompts to begin your time together.
- 10 minutes: Each person/couple prays for their own neighborhood and the requests/needs they have identified.
- 5 minutes: Pray for other needs that affect your neighborhoods: local school staff, city officials, community influencers that don’t know Jesus yet.
- 5 minutes: Worship God in prayer

WEEK 4 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Week 4 Action Step – “Engaging Neighbors”

- The facilitator should then point out Week 4 Action Step – “Engaging Neighbors” Review the contents with the group and have each one try to come up with tentative dates for a neighborhood “event” that would work in their situation. (Give yourselves some time—don’t try to do it this week!)
- Spend some time praying for each other.
- This coming week, continue to read and pray through Days 18-24 in *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood*.

WEEK 4 ACTION STEP

Engaging Neighbors

We cannot care for others from a distance—we have to connect with them in their context. Sometimes that occurs naturally through shared interests (kids on the same little league team) but other times we have to make an intentional effort to build a bridge. Light-House Ministries has some great ideas to start you off:

- Prayer walk your neighborhood in order to meet people
- Organize a block party
- Initiate a neighborhood-wide garage sale
- Volunteer as a “neighborhood watch” house
- Initiate carpools for school or work
- Invite neighbors over to celebrate a holiday—a Christmas party for kids, 4th of July, St Patrick’s Day, Superbowl party, etc. (Note: we do a Labor Day breakfast every year on our street and it has become a neighborhood tradition)
- Volunteer to work on a voter registration drive
- Meet neighborhood parents at athletic events involving their kids
- Make a point of meeting apartment-complex neighbors at common areas such as the pool, laundry room, mailbox, etc. (note: one of our team members found the complex trash dumpster is a strategic place—everyone has to empty trash!)
- Inform people of your profession or trade and make yourself available if they might need the kind of help you offer
- Look for neighbors at school functions, town meetings, ball games, etc.

WEEK 4 ACTION STEP

Engaging Neighbors

- Take advantage of holidays to visit neighbors with small bags of cookies that are themed to that holiday.
- Set up a few chairs in your front yard and see who stops by—you may be surprised!

Some of these events may take some planning and effort; consider inviting neighbors to help.

WEEK 5 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Group Discussion Questions for Each Week:

- What new Biblical insight from Days 18-24 did you discover about prayer this week as you read *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* and prayed?
- What did you learn about your neighbors or neighborhood as you prayed? How has that changed your own prayers and your heart for your neighbors?
- Did you have any stories, struggles, challenges, or God-moments in your prayer times or neighborhood interactions this week?
- How can we pray for you this week—any plans you have to connect with a neighbor, any fears you are battling, any burdens you have for anyone in particular on your street?
- Encourage group members to share any ideas they might have for the coming week: e.g., to “fill in” any missing names on their neighborhood diagram or to act on anything they learned from praying this last week.

Group Prayer Time Sample Agenda

- 5 minutes: Sing a worship song together or, if you prefer, play a worship song and listen. Use the time to settle your heart and let go of the day’s distractions.
- 5 minutes: Use the Prayer Starter prompts to begin your time together.
- 10 minutes: Each person/couple prays for their own neighborhood and the requests/needs they have identified.
- 5 minutes: Pray for other needs that affect your neighborhoods: local school staff, city officials, community influencers that don’t know Jesus yet.
- 5 minutes: Worship God in prayer

WEEK 5 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Week 5 Action Step- “Asking People to Tell Their Story”

The facilitator should then point out Week 5 Action Step – “Asking People to Tell Their Story” This is a key action step. Carefully discuss the contents with the group and practice asking each other questions. Brainstorm good questions each of you might offer to some of your neighbors whom you have gotten to know.

Spend some time praying for each other.

This coming week, continue to read and pray through Days 25-30 in *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood*.

WEEK 5 ACTION STEP

Asking People to Tell Their Story

Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don't miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out. – Colossians 4:5, 6

I entered their lives to understand things from their point of view--- that I might lead them to a God saved life. 1 Corinthians 9:22 [The Message (both passages)]

What does Paul's teaching on evangelism and discipleship teach us? Developing relationships with our neighbors matters!

In my own ministry with non-Christians, I have found that prayer, friendship (that means making time), and patience pave the way for meaningful conversation. The keys:

- **Prayer walking** your neighborhood prepares their hearts – and YOURS.
- **Taking time** to know them. I rarely share about Jesus in a first-time conversation unless circumstances naturally lead that way. I begin by asking lots of questions and then...
- **Listening** to their answers. These conversations also help me to pray more insightfully. Eventually, they will ask questions and God conversations will follow—when they are ready. [NOTE: always listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings as well; He may give you a green light sooner than you expected it].

WEEK 5 ACTION STEP

Asking People to Tell Their Story

A couple of guidelines on opening questions:

- Keep questions general; don't put them in an awkward position by asking pointed questions that might oblige them to divulge more than they want. "Tell me about yourself" or "tell me your story" work well.
- Most people tend to give brief answers at first so have a couple of follow up questions that tell them you really want to listen: "Where did you grow up?" "What brought you to [your city]?" "What do you love to do and why?"
- Remember to ask the question when you have time to hear a long answer.
- Consider an invitation: "I'd love to hear more about you—can I buy you a cup of coffee sometime [Or: "Would you like to come over for a cuppa?"] and swap stories?"

Pray and ask God to show you who you can start with. Look for an opportunity to start a conversation and see what happens. Don't force things—we work on God's timing, not our own.

WEEK 6 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Group Discussion Questions for Each Week:

- What new Biblical insight from Days 25-30 did you discover about prayer this week as you read *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* and prayed?
- What did you learn about your neighbors or neighborhood as you prayed? How has that changed your own prayers and your heart for your neighbors?
- Did you have any stories, struggles, challenges, or God-moments in your prayer times or neighborhood interactions this week?
- How can we pray for you this week—any plans you have to connect with a neighbor, any fears you are battling, any burdens you have for anyone in particular on your street?
- Share ideas each one has for going forward. How can you incorporate lessons from the past four weeks into your prayer life and ministry in your neighborhood?

Group Prayer Time Sample Agenda

- 5 minutes: Sing a worship song together or, if you prefer, play a worship song and listen. Use the time to settle your heart and let go of the day's distractions.
- 5 minutes: Use the Prayer Starter prompts to begin your time together.
- 10 minutes: Each person/couple prays for their own neighborhood and the requests/needs they have identified.
- 5 minutes: Pray for other needs that affect your neighborhoods: local school staff, city officials, community influencers that don't know Jesus yet.
- 5 minutes: Worship God in prayer

WEEK 6 GROUP MEETING

A Six-Week Experience in Prayer Ministry

Week 6 Action Step- “Preparing Your Own Testimony”

- The facilitator should then point out Week 6 Action Step – “Preparing Your Own Testimony” Review the contents with the group; the facilitator should have their own “three-minute story” prepared in order to offer an example. Pair up group members so they can help each other complete this during the week. Pray for invitations to share your respective stories.
- Spend some time praying for each other.

Continue praying for your neighborhood and watch for where God is at work. Join Him.

WEEK 6 ACTION STEP

Preparing Your Own Testimony

The apostle Peter urged believers, “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*” (1 Peter 3:15). We might add, “...And be able to do it briefly.”

The format we use has three parts: My life before Jesus, how I met Jesus, and my life since I became a follower of Jesus.

Before You Start

- Pray. Ask God to direct you and bring key points of your story to mind.
- Summarize. Try to capture your background and overall life in a sentence or two (you don’t need to go into details about your sinful past!). What was the key spiritual battle you dealt with?
- Reflect. Think about how Jesus met you and also the pivotal element of hope or conviction in your encounter.
- Purge. Use common vocabulary. Avoid religious words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to non-Christians.

Your goal is to have a story you can share in three minutes. If they ask questions or otherwise express interest you can then go back and share more details. You want to leave them with a short, memorable explanation of how Jesus changed your life.

Doing the Work

It helps to have a key theme in your story and stay with it—this helps you stay focused and succinct. Here are some suggestions for tackling the three parts of your story:

WEEK 6 ACTION STEP

Preparing Your Own Testimony

My Life Before Jesus

Think about the following and then write:

- What your life was like before you met Jesus
- What sin-related problem you were experiencing
- What made you aware of your need for Jesus
- What brought you to the point where you turned to Jesus

How I Met Jesus

Think about the following and then write:

- What caused you to believe you could trust God—what events pushed you toward Him
- What Scripture passage or key message spoke to you
- How did you come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way

My Life Since I Became a Follower of Jesus

Think about the following and then write:

- The most meaningful change(s) in your life
- What your relationship with God is like now
- The blessings you now experience as a child of God
- The areas you are still working on

Close

Sometimes the above is enough, but occasionally you may sense the listener wants to know more. You should have a simple explanation of what it means to follow Jesus. One way to do this is to tell them to:

Admit that they have sinned against God and need to repent in order to be forgiven

Believe that Jesus died for them to remove the guilt of their sin and give them new and eternal life

Commit to love and serve God with their whole “heart, soul, and mind.”

Adapted from *Developing a Prayer-Care-Share Lifestyle, Developing a Prayer-Care-Share Lifestyle*, by Alvin J. Vander Griend, et.al.