

## **Christian Leadership in a Multifaith World Curriculum Designed by Interfaith America & CCCU**

Module 1 – Christian Foundations for Interfaith Bridge-Building  
*Activity 5 – Exploring a Biblical Foundation for Interfaith Engagement*

### **Overview**

In this activity, students will explore theological and biblical reasons for Christian participation in interfaith cooperation focusing on themes of hospitality and love.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Articulate important biblical reasons for Christians to participate in interfaith engagement.
- Describe examples of Christians whose faith has been enriched through interfaith engagement.

### **External Materials**

- The following Bible passages on hospitality and love of neighbor: Gen 18:2-8; Ex 23:9; Lev 19:33-34; Mt 5:43-47; Mt 22:37-39; Mt 25:31-46; I Tim 3:2; I Tim 5:10; Titus 1:8; Heb 13:2; I Pet 4:9
  - o NOTE: Luke 10:30-37 (Parable of Good Samaritan) and I Corinthians 13 (love) are both deeply relevant to this discussion. Each of those has a separate activity focused on it.

### **Activity Content**

In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus asserts that Scripture's Greatest Commandment is twofold: Love God with all that you are, and love your neighbor as yourself. These verses in particular answer the question, Why should Christians participate in interfaith cooperation? We do so out of obedience to Christ's command to love our neighbors—and increasingly, our neighbors are people who orient around religion differently than we do.

What does love of religious neighbors look like? It is guided by the long tradition of biblical hospitality, exhibited by Abraham in Genesis 18 and commanded in both testaments of Christian Scripture. In order to practice hospitality, we must first prepare ourselves to be good hosts. Preparation might include learning more about our anticipated guests (their preferences and priorities, concerns and commitments). It also includes inner preparation so that we are ready to receive our guests as we would receive Christ himself (Matthew 25:35), open to what we might receive from our guests instead of assuming that we are the only ones with something to offer. Preparation within oneself also includes learning to listen respectfully to our religious neighbors, treating them as if their spiritual lives are genuine and meaningful, as if their insights and experiences are ones from which we too can learn.

Hospitality toward religious neighbors also includes having the patience to allow relationships to form and understanding to develop at their own pace, with the challenges and roadblocks that mark human efforts at connection. As relationships deepen and time is spent together, misunderstanding is inevitable and differences in perspective (some of them insurmountable) will arise. Even when this occurs, we can seek to respect and engage with our neighbors without watering down our own beliefs—and without expecting them to do so. Even if the outcome of some challenging conversations isn't what we might hope for, at the very least we can love our religiously diverse neighbors by listening to them talk about their understanding of God, their sacred scriptures, and their spiritual practices. In doing so, we can learn about another religion from a new vantage point, and we can get to know our neighbors as people with faith lives they care deeply about—just as we care about ours.

Hospitality and love of neighbor are also guided by the following principles to which we can commit:

- **Love fights religious prejudice:** We are complicit in religious discrimination when we don't prepare ourselves to speak out against harmful misconceptions (both those that we hold and those that we hear other Christians articulate about non-Christians). Part of our necessary preparation is gaining religious literacy. Another part is developing relationships with neighbors from non-Christian traditions so that we have firsthand experience with followers of other traditions.
- **Love refuses to bear false witness:** If we allow misinformation and stereotypes about our religious neighbors to persist, we not only fail to show love; we're also guilty of bearing false witness. This is another reason why interfaith engagement is important: We can't be sure that we're telling the truth about our religious neighbors if we haven't taken time to get to know them, listening to what they have to say. Thus, failure to do so is not only inhospitable, but it makes us guilty of lying and of failing to honor others.
- **Love is guided by the Golden Rule:** There are times when Christians speak of their own faith in hopes that others may be attracted to Christ. When we do so, we need to be sure that our witnessing is guided by the Golden Rule, which (as theologian Miroslav Volf says) tells us to "witness to others in the way you think others should witness to you." Volf notes that the Golden Rule of witnessing also tells us to "witness to others only if you are prepared to let them witness to you."
- **Love works with others for the common good:** When we join with our religious neighbors in working for the common good, we demonstrate love—for the recipients of our efforts as well as for the neighbors with whom we engage in such efforts. (And that's another important argument for interfaith cooperation.)

## Student Assignment Options

**ACTIVITY ONE:** Read and reflect on the following Bible verses that speak about **hospitality**

- **Genesis 18:2-8:** In these verses, three mysterious visitors come to Abraham. How does he treat them? (Be very specific, thinking in particular about the hard work and attention to detail he exhibits in his welcoming their visit.) What message do the visitors have for him and his wife Sarah?
- **Hebrews 13:2:** Most scholars agree that this verse is alluding to Genesis 18, when Abraham's hospitality toward three strangers really meant that he was welcoming God's messengers. How might it change your treatment of strangers if you thought some of them might actually be messengers from God?

- **Exodus 23:9 and Lev 19:33-34:** Think of a time when you were treated as a “foreigner” for your faith. Describe it. How were you mistreated? What did it feel like to be treated as a “foreigner”?
- **I Timothy 3:2 and 5:10; Titus 1:8; I Peter 4:9:** “Showing hospitality” is an action that is mentioned often in lists of expectations for early Christians, as seen in these verses from New Testament epistles. How might your Christian life be enriched if you took this expectation more seriously? What acts of hospitality toward others might you start doing—or doing more deliberately?

**ACTIVITY TWO:** Read and reflect on the following Bible verses that speak about **love of neighbor**:

- **Matthew 5:43-47:** What does Jesus say in these verses about love toward others—toward our neighbors, our enemies, and even those who persecute us? What do you think verse 45 means when it says that God “causes the sun to rise...[on all] and sends rain... [on all]”? In what ways do Christians often exhibit the lack of love mentioned in verse 47?
- **Matthew 22:37-39:** In these verses, Jesus asserts that the Greatest Commandment in Scripture is twofold: Love God with all that you are AND love your neighbor as yourself. How is love of God related to love of neighbor? How does love of neighbor relate to love of God? Really dig into this, trying to come up with specific examples that might apply to your own life.
- **Matthew 25:31-46:** In this passage, some people are praised and some are rejected. What did those who are praised do? (See verses 35-36.) What did those who are rejected fail to do? (See verses 41-45.). Why do you think that Christ says that HE was the “stranger,” the one who was in need? What additional weight does that give to the command to love others?

**FOLLOW-UP TO ACTIVITY ONE AND/OR TWO:**

- Reflect on the lessons of these verses through the lens of Christians engaging with religious others:
  - What, specifically, might it look like for **you** to extend hospitality to a religious “stranger” or neighbor, following some of the guidance provided in these verses?
  - Think of a time when you have encountered (or are likely to encounter) people from other religions in your future profession. Drawing from the verses you examined in Activity One or Activity Two, make a list for yourself that you can post somewhere (On your bathroom mirror? In your cubicle at work? On your phone?) to remind yourself of what hospitality and love of neighbor might look like. Use some of these statements to get you started:
    - As a follower of Christ, I practice hospitality because...
    - As a nurse [or whatever your chosen profession is] who is a follower of Christ, hospitality toward my religious neighbors might mean:
      - I will...
      - I won't...

**Going Deeper: Additional Resources**

- *Read:* Larson, Marion H. and Sara L. H. Shady. *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World* (IVP Academic, 2016), Chapters 1-3.
- *Read:* Mouw, Richard, “The Challenge of Other Religions” and “Christian Leadership in a Pluralistic World,” in *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*
- *Explore:* [Neighborly Faith](#) is a student-led movement that seeks to bring Christians and Muslims together. They’ve got a variety of podcasts and resources on their website that could provide useful supplements to this lesson as well as other modules.