

FamilyLife Today[®] Radio Transcript

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Loving Your Neighbor Without Being Weird

Guest: Amy Lively
From the series: The Neighborhood Café (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: There are people who want to practice hospitality, but the thought of inviting folks over to the house is just overwhelming. Amy Lively says she decided she would keep hospitality very simple.

Amy: I do clean one room—the room where everybody is going to be. I look at it the day before, at the same time of day, so I can see, “Where does the light shine?” This is the really good thing about evening gatherings. You just have to dim the lights and candles. [Laughter] I just straighten up that one room. They’re not going to look under the sofa. They’re not going to open the drawers. I dust the stuff on top and clean off the upholstery. You know, people are not going to remember the details of your house. They’re going to remember how they *felt* in your house.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Friday, November 1st. Our host is the President of FamilyLife[®], Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. There is a connection between hospitality and the mission that God has called every one of us to—the Great Commission. We’ll talk about that connection today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. You know, in the Bible, one of the spiritual gifts that is described—I think it’s in First Corinthians, Chapter 12, where it lists a bunch of spiritual gifts. One of them is the gift of evangelism. I’ve heard people, over the years, who have looked at that list and said, “Okay, that’s not my gift,” and maybe thought to themselves, as a result, “I don’t have any responsibility in this area.”

Dennis: That excuses them—right.

Bob: But Jesus seemed to have a different opinion; didn’t He?

Dennis: He did. He commanded us to go to the world. Sometimes, that world is right next door—it’s not across the big pond to another country—to a Third World country. It’s to a neighbor, who is isolated—who lives just down the street—who needs us to come: [Sound of knocking] “Hi! I’m Dennis, and I’m your neighbor. I’m really sorry I haven’t met you.” That was the training that we received, earlier, from Amy Lively, who heads up a ministry called The Neighborhood Café. Welcome back, Amy.

Amy: Thank you very much.

Dennis: Amy and her husband David live in Lancaster, Ohio. They've been married for 23 years. They have a totally obedient daughter, Emma—

Amy: Absolutely! [Laughter]

Dennis: —and a very holy dog by the name of—

Amy: Lily.

Dennis: Lily? Oh, that's pretty! I've got a granddaughter named Lily.

—and an unsaintly cat. What's his name?

Amy: Stone. [Laughter] He's got a heart of stone. [Laughter] I just call him Mister.

Dennis: She has put together a kit that really helps people reach out to their neighbors and get connected.

Bob: Well, you know, I'm just sitting here thinking—this time of year—between now and the end of the year—if there's ever a time to open your home and invite folks in, this really is a set-up time of year to open up your home.

Amy: This is the perfect time of year because at this time of year, it's not unexpected to get something from your neighbors.

Bob: When there's an invitation to come to a holiday open house, that's a great opening opportunity to get to know folks. You would use that as a preliminary event and then invite folks: "After the first of the year, we're going to start getting together, every other week, for a Bible study," or, "...to go through a book for a book club." Do you call it a Bible study? How do you describe it?

Amy: I do call it a Bible study. I call it a devotional. I call it a gathering. After a while, it becomes the café: "Are you going to café this week?"—as they [begin] to understand that. It has to be natural for the hostess—so, come up with whatever works for you.

Bob: I have to go all the way back on this because we talked about you getting this prompting and kind of denying it for eight months. I think all of us have had this sense that: "Boy! We ought to do that." But something pushed you over the line. Where was the fire in your belly? Do you think you just have a burden for evangelism?

Amy: I do, but that was a long process. God had to really break my heart for my neighbors. What happened—when I first heard the words, "neighborhood Bible study", I was so excited to do it. I had a little logo, and what I was going to say on the invitation. I

knew how it would all play out. When the reality of that hit me, and I thought of what it would actually take, I got scared.

What happened was—because I was being, personally, disobedient to something God had laid on my heart—guess what happened? He’s a loving parent. He disciplined me. My excuse of, “I don’t have time,”—He really showed me what it was like to not have time. I mean, I was working around the clock. I was taking two steps forward and three steps back. He really took my time.

We understand how that works, on financial principle, when we don’t give Him freely of our money. It happened with my time. My worship dried up. My time with Him dried up. My personal prayer life just flew out the window. He showed me that this desire was not about *me*. It was not about *my* ability to perform it. It was about the people around me. It was about my neighbors. When He broke my heart about my neighbors, then I was able to go and do it.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: As you’re talking, I can’t help but think of what Barbara would say if she were sitting here. She would say, “Why don’t you tell them”—because she wouldn’t want to be the one to tell—so, she would say, “Why don’t you tell them about Adornaments[®]?—which is a new ornament that Barbara created around Christmas. It’s the names of Christ.

Amy: That’s a *beautiful* way to introduce a spiritual conversation in a very natural way.

Dennis: It really is. Barbara’s done this around His Christmas names and His royal names. There are seven in each set. They’re priced in such a way that you could afford to give this to your immediate neighbors on your street and not go broke.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: It’s a simple way, but a nice way, to celebrate the season of Christmas and to esteem your neighbor in the process.

Amy: It is. I like to tell women that this is a whole new way to love your neighbors without being weird. We don’t want to come onto people with an agenda—with recruitment—with something that’s not interesting to them. We want to be just very natural. Everyone loves to receive a gift. People *love* to come into our homes. People really do—I’m convinced—want to connect with their neighbors. Inviting them over and giving them a gift like that is a very natural way.

Bob: I think there are some folks, who are listening, who would be concerned that, if you had one of these introductory neighborhood cafés, the folks who live two doors down, on the other side of the street—that have the yard signs up during the political

season—that are different than the yard signs you would put in your yard—you are going to get into World War III. The clash of the worldviews is going to come out; and you're not going to know—when they start asking you all kinds of cultural or social questions—you're not going to know how to answer, without looking bad.

Amy: You know, I *really* wanted God to give me that verse that said, “Love your neighbors that are like yourself.”

Bob: Yes!

Amy: Yes, and that didn't happen. [Laughter] There are people who are very different from us. We have different opinions. We have different beliefs.

Dennis: But has that happened at your home?

Amy: Never, never, never!

Dennis: That's my point. When people come into your home—I don't quite understand the psyche of it—but it's like they park those controversial issues at the curb and end up walking into your home because you've invited them into a very personal place. They're not going to be offensive, I don't think, right off the bat.

Amy: I have never had it happen. I have never had anyone slam the door on me. I have never had anyone call me names. I've never had anyone sic their dog on me. Everyone that I have met in my neighborhood has been kind. In my home, especially, it has *never* happened that we—now, I'm not saying that we always agree on every single thing; but those agreements have been friendly. Those agreements have been people having a conversation.

So, having that big-picture view of the different people is something that you do have to acknowledge and recognize one woman's issue and then soften that for another woman.

Dennis: There's another fear that I think some folks have—and that's that: “Our house isn't *Better Homes & Gardens*[®]—

Amy: Yes, Pinterest[®] is a dangerous thing.

Bob: Oh, yes; yes.

Dennis: Yes. So, how do you deal with that because it really isn't about having to wow everybody.

Amy: People are not going to remember the details of your house. They're going to remember how they *felt* in your house. On the other hand, there are some

housekeeping things that you should take care of. I do clean one room—the room where everybody is going to be. I look at it the day before, at the same time of day, so I can see, “Where does the light shine?” This is the really good thing about evening gatherings. You just have to dim the lights and candles. [Laughter] I just straighten up that one room. They’re not going to look under the sofa. They’re not going to open the drawers. I dust the stuff on top, and clean off the upholstery.

You know, I think our homes should be ready to have people into them because they are not our homes—they are the Lord’s house that He has gifted to us. Maintaining the care of that is part of just our stewardship of God’s gifts to us. I just try to keep it very simple. I have learned that if it’s not easy for me, nobody else is going to have fun either.

Bob: You have a thing that you include in The Neighborhood Café kit that’s called the Hostess Covenant?

Amy: I do.

Bob: What is that?

Amy: The Hostess Covenant is taken from—in Paul’s pastoral letters—when he was telling people, “Here’s how to lead others.” These are Scriptures I’ve taken from his letters that guide the woman in her prayers for her own home and for her own neighborhood. The very first thing on the Hostess Covenant is: “I commit to love my neighbors sincerely, not shove them into an agenda.” This is the whole not being weird part. It just comes from *sincere* love of other people. The verse is First Timothy 1:5-8. In *The Message*, it says, “The whole point of what we’re urging is simply love. Love uncontaminated by self-interest and counterfeit faith; a life open to God.” That’s all we’re asking for—that’s all we’re asking for.

Dennis: People are really looking for authentic human beings who are real—

Amy: Absolutely, yes.

Dennis: —who are willing to share their lives but, as you said, not be weird.

Amy: You know, for some reason, the women always respond when I tell of the time—when I was having an open house, and I had my house looking good. I lit a fire, but I left the flu closed. So, the *whole* house filled with smoke, five minutes before women were supposed to be coming over. [Laughter]

That endears to people because they’re thinking, “I’ve messed up, too,”—just being real about my own mistakes, my own need for the Lord, and my own struggles in my life. You don’t have to give gory details. You don’t have to turn that into something that could be gossip; but just to say: “Hey, I need this more than *anyone*! I have received God’s

grace and forgiveness more than *anyone*. That is why I am doing this—not because I am perfect, not because I have all the answers, not because I feel perfectly prepared to do this—but because I have needed and received this from the Lord.”

Dennis: And all of us have been in homes where the hostess has, maybe, made a mistake—and has then spent the evening apologizing, 43 ways south of Sunday.

Amy: Well, when you have to open all of the windows—and it’s 20 degrees out there—you do have to apologize—to let the smoke out! [Laughter] But you’ve got to get over it. You’ve got to get over it. It’s not about your house. It’s not about your little Pinterest centerpiece. It is about the people, who are sitting, right in front of you, and listening to what is on their heart.

That’s what Jesus did. He asked questions: “What are you talking about?” “What do you think about that?” “What do you think the Bible says about that?”

Dennis: This may sound kind of dumb; but what’s the first thing you say, as you greet people, who you don’t know, who are coming to your house for the first time?

Amy: “Hi! My name is Amy. Welcome to my house.”

Dennis: That’s it?

Amy: Yes! It’s very simple: “Hi! My name is Amy. Where do you live? Thank you for coming. How long have you lived here? Where did you live beforehand? Tell me about your family. Do you work outside the home?” I ask questions about their lives.

Bob: And, obviously, this is something you’ve been doing for a while. When did you have your first neighborhood café?

Amy: In 2008.

Bob: Along the way, you’ve run into other women, who have said: “I would love to do something like that. I just need some help.” You put a book together—you put a planning guide together—you put the invitation in—you put the whole thing into a kit. You don’t just want to see the Rosewood Café. You want to see this happening in neighborhoods, all across the country.

Amy: Yes. Just this morning, we had two new cafés register through my website—one in Wisconsin, and one in Illinois. I also had a request for a café in Jacksonville, Florida. These are starting in neighborhoods, across America, because—you know what?—we’re not that different. We’re not that different, wherever we go. We all have the same needs.

Bob: By the way, we've got a link on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com. If folks want to come to your website and find out more, they can just go to FamilyLifeToday.com, click on the link, and they're right there. About how many cafés are there, around the country?

Amy: There are cafés from California all the way up to New England. There's one in Alaska and even one in Canada. They pretty much follow the population density—a lot in the Midwest, a lot in Texas, and a lot happening in Ohio. An exact number—I don't know—but the café kits have been shipped all over the place. Women are figuring out that this is a way they can say: "You know what? I can do this!"

Dennis: Do they have like a Zagat deal that ranks the food? [Laughter] Five star.

Amy: We do share recipes! You know what? One of the things that I learned, along the way, is that I now have a snack sign-up list. I ask women to sign up for the different days that we're getting together. I ask someone to bring a healthy snack and someone to bring a "guilty" snack. That was because, first of all, it was going to be too much on me to do it. Again, I would be stressed and not enjoying it. But it also builds participation and ownership. They start sharing recipes. Again, women want a purpose. You know, we do community service projects together. Those have all just come very naturally out of the time together as we learn what's on people's hearts.

Bob: The Rosewood Café is not going to show up on TripAdvisor or Urbanspoon. [Laughter]

Amy: I would love it! I would love it to happen!

Dennis: Yes.

Bob: You know, as Amy's describing this, I'm thinking back, 25 and almost 30 years ago, when you started putting together the *HomeBuilders Couples Series*[®]—these small group studies. It was this kind of neighborhood engagement that you had in mind; wasn't it?

Dennis: It was. You invited people in—the common need of marriage got a lot of neighbors together around the Bible, practically, finding out that the issues that they were dealing with in their marriages were not unlike what was happening in ours.

Amy: Well, surprise!

Dennis: Yes! Like normal human beings struggle with differences in their marriage. I mean, earlier, before we came together in the studio, you described your own marriage of 23 years. You said, "Well, we've still got issues."

Amy: And I pray that we always do because that means we're growing. I'm learning about God's grace in my own marriage. And I'm receiving my husband's forgiveness, too.

Dennis: By the way, back to Bob's point here. This really would be a great way, Bob, to crack the ice in a neighborhood toward the possibility of having a *HomeBuilders Couples Study* in your home or an *Art of Marriage*[®] small group.

Bob: Yes, *The Art of Marriage* small group has some video assistance so you can watch a 30-minute video and then go through a workbook together. The *HomeBuilders* study guides are really more discussion-based without the video support—whatever works in the dynamics of your group.

Amy: And I've done both. I've done things with videos—I've done things with workbooks. I've written my own material for it. When you build the relationship with people and you get to know—"Oh, most of my women are married," or, "Everyone has an interest in raising children,"—then, each neighborhood café decides, on their own, what is the next best thing for them to do. It's very flexible. You can take it any direction you want.

When you build strong marriages in your community—not only do you have the personal blessing of knowing you've had a small part in that—that God has used you there to do His work—but it builds a safe community.

Bob: How much of your life revolves around you hosting a café? I mean, is this something that—you have your job, your family, and the café ministry?

Amy: Well, because it's a ministry, for me, it's a lot more. When I think about just *my* neighborhood and *my* home—because one of the things that God has always told me is: "Amy, you've got to do it. You can't just preach it. You've got to do it." So, I do it.

I would say, to host an open house, would take: a couple of hours to pass out the invitations—we do try to connect with people individually; getting my house ready—an hour or so; preparing my heart is a daily matter; the actual of having them in—I do about 90 minutes. It's about two hours, from before and afterwards.

Dennis: Share with our listeners how you involve Emma. She's a teenager. Undoubtedly, she's involved in these things. She helps you; right?

Amy: Well, most of the time, she's at school because I have done it in the morning. Our neighborhood does not have a lot of kids her age—so this has not been her passion the way it's been mine. But one thing that is very important is—if you're married and if you have a family, that this is something your family understands—that I think our most important ministry is in our home, first of all.

I don't think your kids have to be perfect. I don't think you have to have a marriage that's all together in order to be hospitable to your neighbors. But I would say to make sure you have your family's alignment on this is very, very important—as well as church.

Bob: So, the folks, who are listening, are going: “Okay, maybe, I'm getting one of those taps. Maybe, eight months from now, I'll act on it.” It took you eight months before you did.

Amy: Yes. I get emails from people who say, “I've been thinking about this for a couple of years.”

Bob: Okay—so, somebody who's thinking about this—and thinking, “Maybe, I should do this,”—and they want to go ahead and get the kit—what's the kit going to provide for them?

Amy: The kit is going to have everything they need to host their open house—in terms of inviting people into their home—letting them know what to say when they knock on the door—what people will say back to them. I give them suggested scripts. Again, everything is so flexible and adaptable. It's going to give them tools to keep track of who they've talked to, and who's coming, and who continues to come back. It's going to give them tools to follow-up and make those relationships go deeper. It's going to give them a curriculum to talk about.

Bob: There are recipes if they want to cook something easy.

Amy: Yes! Yes.

Bob: There are invitations—pre-printed invitations that are in there.

Amy: Yes.

Bob: You've really made it as simple as possible for someone to do this.

Amy: Thank you. There are also some free resources, at my website, as well—the guest list, a snack list, a leader's guide.

Bob: Once again, we've got a link, at FamilyLifeToday.com, for anybody who wants to get to your website.

Dennis: And, Amy, I want to say, “Thanks for joining us on *FamilyLife Today*.” I love your idea. I love—I think, even more importantly, that you're calling folks into action. I think today, more than maybe any other time in our nation's history, we've got a lot of folks who are concerned about what's happening to our country. They just don't know what to do. What you're giving them is a very simple step that they can take to make a difference where they live.

Amy: You know, when Jesus said to pray for the workers of the harvest—in the very next verse, which happens to be the next chapter—so, sometimes, we miss it—He said to those same people: “It’s you. You’re the one that I’m sending. You’re the one that I’m sending out there.” There is a time for prayer and there is a time for action.

Bob: Well, right now is a time to go to the web. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com so you can find out more about the kit that Amy Lively has put together to help you be more hospitable in your neighborhood, and engage with your neighbors, and share Christ with your neighbors in a way that is comfortable, and convenient, and winsome, and engaging. Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com and find out more about The Neighborhood Café kit from Amy Lively.

And there’s information there about the *HomeBuilders* series—the couples studies that we’ve put together that have been used, now, for more than two decades by tens of thousands of couples. It’s a great way to engage people in conversation around their marriage that also points them to look deeper into the Scriptures to see what the Bible has to say about our marriages and about our families. Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com for all of this—FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY; 1-800-358-6329—1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY”.

I want to share with you, before we wrap up today, a *really* nice email we received from a dad who wrote to say: “

Thanks for programs you did recently on dads dating their daughters. I happened to catch the episode where you recommended starting to date your daughter at age four or five. That got my attention because I have a four / ‘I-am-going-to-be-five years-old’ daughter; but the idea of taking her on a date had never crossed my mind.

She has three brothers, including a twin. They are all very close in age. It’s a rough and tumble crowd. On Saturday, following your program, I went ahead and invited her out on her very first special daddy/daughter date. For nearly three-and-a-half hours, over cheeseburgers, fries, and ice cream cones, she talked non-stop. All I had to do was sit there, and look directly in those big, blue eyes, and smile and nod occasionally, brush back the stray curl that always seems to escape from her unruly mop.

He says:

Our date was the first time I had deliberately treated my daughter like a little lady. When we got back home, she launched from the cab of my truck, wrapped her little arms tightly around my neck. As

she clung to me, unwilling to let go, she whispered in my ear, “Thank you, Daddy, for making me feel so special and for being with just *me*, without the boys.”

This dad says:

I held her for a long time, tears streaming down my face, telling her over and over again just how special she is to me and how much I love her. It was one of the best moments of my life so far—at least until our next date. So, thanks for reminding me of what a precious gift from God my daughter is and encouraging me to cherish and love her as He does.

Then, he signed his note—he said, “A no longer totally clueless dad”.

You know, we love hearing from listeners about how God is using *FamilyLife Today* to strengthen your family, to strengthen your marriage relationship, and to point you back to the Source for life, and for hope, and for godliness—that is Jesus Christ. We appreciate those of you who get in touch with us. We also appreciate those of you who make this radio program possible—those of you who help support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today* with your donations. We are listener-supported. Those donations help cover the cost of producing and syndicating this daily radio program. So, in a very real sense, you are partners with us in this ministry.

If you can help with a donation today, we’d like to send you, as a thank-you gift, the audio book, *Thanksgiving: A Time to Remember*. We took Barbara Rainey’s book—that tells the story of Thanksgiving—we had it read dramatically with some dramatic enhancements, as well. The audio book is our thank-you gift to you when you help support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today* this week.

You can do that, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the button that says, “I CARE”, and make an online donation; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Make a donation over the phone. Just ask for the Thanksgiving audio book when you do that. Or request the Thanksgiving audio book when you write a check and mail it to *FamilyLife Today* at P O Box 71111, Little Rock, AR. Our zip code is 72223.

With that, we’ve got to wrap things up for this week. Thanks for being with us. I hope you have a great weekend. Hope you and your family can worship together in church this weekend.

On Monday, join us back because we’re going to talk about something that many women have told us is an issue for them—that’s the issue of wanting to be in control. We’ll talk about whether that is an issue for women and, if so, what do you do about it? We’ll have a couple of guests who are going to be joining us for that discussion. I hope you can tune in, as well.

Bob: I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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