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Part 1, Meet the Warners: a Decade of Neighboring

<http://www.theneighboringchurch.com/blog/part-1-meet-the-warners-a-decade-of-neighboring/>

by Krista Petty | Feb 1, 2016

Drue Warner is one of those incognito neighborhood superheroes like Don Simmons (featured on last week's blog). I wish Drue and his wife, Laura, were MY NEIGHBORS. Really, I do! I'm envious of the folks that live on his street! Drue loves craft beer. Laura loves gardening. Together, they lead a neighborhood Connect Group from Perimeter Church called "Hops and Horticulture."



Along with their two hysterical and beautiful kids Grace (10) and Micah (6), the Warner's primary ministry strategy has been to love, serve, and bless those around them. Over the past 10 years, their personal ministry areas of focus have included:



- investing in neighborhood relationships, including starting and serving on neighborhood Welcome Committee and serving on the HOA board
- sending their kids to the local public elementary school instead of their church's private Christian school (read about this decision in detail in our Resource: [Going Public- Why Christian Parents Might Choose Public School](#))
- starting and giving leadership to All Pro Dad at their children's school (including developing a leadership team of 15 dads and a database of 330 dads)
- mentoring in the public schools

- doing fun stuff (i.e. throwing parties, touring local craft breweries, coordinating family “corn hole” nights, etc.)

Using that simple strategy of LOVE, SERVE and BLESS, the Warners estimate (very conservatively) that they have met 124 different households of neighbors and people in the community. Of those, 73 of them became social friendships. “We knew their name and they knew ours, we’ve spent some amount of time together, and they’ve been in our home,” explains Drue. From those 73 social friendships, he estimates 50 of them developed into trusted friendships. “These are people we have below-the-surface conversations with and we know enough that they would give us access to their home while out of town and visa-versa,” he shares. Digging deeper, of those 70 + social and/or trusted friendships, they’ve been able to pray with and/or have a spiritual conversation with approximately 60 households, of whom approximately 25 households have come to faith (or are in the process of coming to faith).

WHOA! I’m not sure I’ve met anyone in neighboring keeping track like the Drue and Laura do. I learned that it’s really not (and never has been) about the numbers. However, after a decade of living this simple lifestyle of love, serve and bless, Drue felt challenged and convicted in a staff meeting to reflect on the fruitfulness of it all. (You’ll read more about that staff meeting in the interview transcript below).

Interviewing Drue, who is an Area Pastor for Perimeter Church and Director of Live, Work and Play Ministries, felt more like sitting around a fire-pit swapping stories than a formal phone interview. He makes you feel immediately like a treasured friend, where you can be unguarded and unfiltered—a great quality in good neighboring. Our conversation reminded me of something Brian Mavis once said, “Most conversations work like this: I will reveal as much as you reveal. Generally the depth of the relationships is that I am only going to share to the level of what you have shared with me.”

I was going to take my interview with Drue and edit it down into a simple blog...but there’s too much good stuff from our conversation. So, you get the transcript in its entirety over three posts. One thing to draw your attention to within his story: it’s not about WHAT they do in the neighborhood. The real secret to their success is in the WHY. The right motivation makes all the difference.

Krista Petty: What inspired this personal ministry strategy of love, serve, bless for you and Laura?

Drue Warner: You know, Laura and I started doing this when we got married. We met on staff at Perimeter Church. She had already been there seven years when I came on staff. We had a common heart for mission and evangelism.

People think we are superstars for missional stuff and honestly, we are scratching our heads. Shouldn't this be normal for all of us as believers? We feel like loving, serving and blessing should be our natural response to the unbelievable grace that has been given to us by Jesus Christ. While we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly and we were the ungodly! We were his enemies. He came across enemy lines and rescued us from ourselves and our sins.

He not only rescued us, he adopted us into his family and gave us all the rights and privileges that his children get. It's a love that has been birthed in our hearts, from Him, that's too big to contain, and it just overflows out of us. That is the only thing I can say that has inspired the missional focus of our lives.

KP: You're still very passionate about this even after 10 years in the same place. Why do you think that is?

DW: In my late teens, as I was heading off to college, we had a meltdown in my church (where my dad was the pastor). It rocked my world, and as a result I headed off to college with an intense anger and hatred towards God and church. I had eight years of my life where I ran from God. I didn't want anything to do with God and his church...for eight years.

But God and his grace made me restless in my 20s. I was out of college and plagued with a lack of purpose for my life. I was working in sales and I thought, "Am I going to do this for the rest of my life and then die? Is that it?" That lack of purpose put me on a quest into the gospel, which put me on my face admitting, "God I am yours. I am a mess, a train wreck, and you can do with me whatever you want."

I think the kicker for me in missional living is that I know what it's like to be a non-Christian. In college all my best friends were non-Christians, including me. Growing up in the church, I saw what a poor job we did at connecting and building relationships with non-Christians. Now that I have eight years' experience under my belt of being one, I feel like God gave me some insight on how to connect and build relationships—not only how to do that but also a desire to do that.

Lastly, Laura and I are still passionate about missional living after 10 years in the same place, because our neighbors have become our friends. We love them and they love us. This isn't about us trying to "get people saved," it's about love, friendship, and community, and the ironic thing is that when it's about love, friendship, and community, people "get saved" and lives are transformed (including ours)!

KP: Laura was already on the path to missional living as well?

DW: Laura and her sister grew up in church and got involved in global missions at an early age. Laura was the youngest and first person in their church to go overseas for missions. While she was in high school she spent every summer doing global missions. I asked her one time how she became so passionate about global missions and she told me about a time, when she was 15 years old, that she was serving with Teen Missions in the Philippines, and she was talking to an older Filipino man, sharing the gospel with him. He asked her, “How long have you known about this good news?” Laura stumbled a bit with her answer and said, “Well, our country was founded because of this belief.” The older man then asked, “Why has it taken you so long to get this good news to me and my people?” That really pierced her heart with a passion for evangelism and mission.

KP: So, I was looking through the pre-interview notes and most people I know don't track the ministry fruitfulness of neighboring to the extent you have. Tell me about that.

DW: Well, this is kind of funny, actually. We were not tracking it along the way and it isn't a perfect record. The reason I went back and did that was because our church really believes in equipping for evangelism. Our Senior Pastor, Randy Pope, is one of the most effective persons I've ever met in sharing his faith, and Randy teaches a fantastic seminar on evangelism called, “Xpress Your Faith.” As I sat through one of the sessions, I can recall hearing that there are three primary methods to missional living, which are: Invitational (inviting people to events), Literature (giving people resources to read) and Investigative (helping people to investigate the claims of Christ). I agree wholeheartedly with those three methods (and utilize all of those approaches), but those were not the three words that came to my mind! The three words that came to my mind were Love, Serve and Bless. Neither is wrong, they're just different, and in a lot of ways, they overlap.

Sitting through that training got me thinking about whether or not mine and Laura's approach to evangelism (to love, serve, and bless) was effective and if so, to what degree. Like a lot of churches, our leadership is careful to make sure that whatever we're giving to our people has a credible track record of effectiveness. I'm wired the same way! So, I decided I needed to go back and look at the fruit from our approach to missional living. As I reflected back on the names, relationships, conversations, and stories of transformation, I became overwhelmed at what God had been doing through our simple strategy to love, serve, and bless our neighbors.

KP: What did you do with the details you collected?

DW: I took that info to our leadership and told them that they got me curious as to whether or not our strategy for missions and evangelism was fruitful and if it was worth sharing with other people. Honestly, I don't even know if our statistics are very good. There may be other people that say, "If you've met 130 households at least 60 should have come to faith." I don't know who determines what's successful, but I think what God is up to is so much bigger than what we could possibly imagine. I believe that as we scatter seed and love people well, the hope of the gospel gets out and gets caught up in the cracks and crevices and takes root in places and ways that we would never have imagined.

Part 2, Meet the Warners: Neighboring All In

<http://www.theneighboringchurch.com/blog/part-2-meet-the-warners-neighboring-all-in/>

by Krista Petty | Feb 1, 2016

Drue Warner serves as Area Pastor for Perimeter Church in Georgia. He and his wife, Laura, have a decade of experience loving their neighbors. Here is the second part of Drue's interview with me.

Krista Petty: Your mantra of Love, Serve and Bless where you Live, Work & Play sounds simple. Where do faith conversations come in?

Drue Warner: I think there are people in our evangelical community who shy away from this idea of simply loving, serving, and blessing because it feels like a social gospel—which has been accused of not giving people the truth of the gospel or the word. But I know that this is not what this is because our hearts have been so transformed by the gospel that it is our greatest and deepest desire that the people we are interacting with would know the hope and love of Christ. So it is our great intention to look for the opportunities to verbalize our experience and our hope in Christ.

I think this missional living—when it is motivated by the unbelievable grace of God that a heart has experienced and been transformed—can't compare it to the social gospel. It might look like it, but it is not the same.

KP: Do you have a story that illustrates the fruit of love, serve, bless?

DW: We have new neighbors that moved in right next door to us about four months ago. They are a young couple in their 20s with a little boy. We have just sought to get to know them and become friends. If he's out mowing the lawn and I am out there, I will ask him if he wants to have a beer and we watch the kids play—that simple stuff. We have intentionally NOT invited them to church or initiated spiritual conversation, we are just trying to develop some relationship.

I was working from home about a month ago and sitting in my Adirondack chair in the front yard making phone calls to people at church we are shepherding. That morning I was making a phone call to a couple whose marriage was in crisis. I just got off the phone and the wife next door came out with her one-year-old and was pulling weeds. She greeted me with, "Hey Drue, how are you? Working from home?"

I said, "Yeah, as long as I have a computer and phone I can pretty much work anywhere." I walked over towards her and just happened to mention that the last phone call I made was tough, a marriage was in crisis. I then said, "You know, we all struggle in some area or another. I've come to learn we are all broken and we all struggle."

She started to break down and told me, "I just found out yesterday that my mom was diagnosed with a terminal disease." About that same time, Laura came out of the house and saw us. God opened such an unbelievable door for us to pray for her and love on her. She actually called her husband in that moment and told him how God worked this out for her.

Since then, our friendship has grown, we've continued to have great conversations, they've asked for help in trying to find a church home, and he comes regularly to our neighborhood men's group. I really think all this has happened just because we've loved them, we've been available, and we've been attentive to what's going on in their lives. Plus, they like us (at least we think so)!

KP: What has your family received from this lifestyle of availability to love, serve and bless?

DW: Anybody involved in seeing God work in other people's lives through your life knows that there is really nothing more satisfying on the planet. We've experienced a lot of joy from it. And, we are blessed beyond measure because we have a huge amount of friends! It's almost overwhelming. We almost can't do anything because our list of people to invite is too big! The gospel becomes so much richer and real to us because every time we end up sharing the love of Christ in words and deeds, we are reminded of how great his love is for us.

KP: Being available for others must come with some sacrifices, too. Tell me about those.

DW: Well, when people know you care and you are available you can't tell them you are open 9-5. It means that we get interrupted. There are times that things aren't so convenient and we drop what we are doing to attend to what is going on in someone else's life. We do our best to set boundaries, but sometimes you just have to unlock the gate because it's an important thing going on.

Our church had a ministry campaign that started a while back. It was called "ALL IN". When you are all in for the gospel, it means everything belongs to God. Time. Resources. Money. Preferences. Desires. Everything gets pushed across the table to him. It's crazy and exciting. Sometimes it can be hard, frustrating and exhausting but it's an adventure that is worth being on. And... we spend a lot of money on groceries!

Part 3, Meet the Warners: Hops & Horticulture

<http://www.theneighboringchurch.com/blog/part-3-meet-the-warners-hops-horticulture/>

by Krista Petty | Feb 1, 2016

Drue Warner serves as Area Pastor for Perimeter Church in Georgia. He and his wife, Laura, have a decade of experience loving their neighbors.

Krista Petty: You've been living this ministry experience and experiment for quite a while. So how are you equipping others with what you have learned?

Drue Warner: My role at Perimeter Church has changed to some degree over the years. My role of being Director of Live, Work and Play ministries was technically two "roles" ago. In that role I led classes on missional living and some other things. I have hung on to that title because it's cool and I like to keep that vision in front of me and people as often as I can.



These days, I am the Area Pastor for the Suwanee/Sugar Hill area. Perimeter has five geographical areas where our congregation pulls from. We have a real intention to shepherd the people in those areas the best that we can. As Area Pastor, I have 50 elders that I am shepherding in my zone. Each of them are shepherding 8-12 families or households. Through my role with those elders and my role on the Area Pastor team, I share what missional living looks like. The equipping happens a lot through relationships and conversations, and less from programs. When I was doing Live, Work and Play ministries there was a class I taught but we aren't doing that right now.

KP: From interviewing other neighboring, missional-living leaders, I've been told it is better NOT to program so much because programs have a shelf life: programs live and die. I would think that equipping leaders to love, serve and bless their neighbors within what you are already doing gives it a life well beyond a ministry with a title, budget, class or program.

DW: You are exactly right! The leaders at Perimeter want the DNA of missional living to be embedded in our pastors and elders. They wanted me to be at the table with the area pastors to influence that. In this role, I have more opportunity for influence than when I was Director of Live, Work and Play ministry.

I think we have been given a good number of relationships so we try to let your lives speak for themselves. Now, we goof up and fail. There are times where we lock the doors and windows and don't want to be with anybody, but by in large, we try to let others learn from what we are learning and doing.

I'm always asking the question, "What does it look like to understand the gospel to a degree where we aren't *pulling* a missional life out of someone but it is *flowing* out of him or her?" That is really the biggest thing. We have to give people the gospel in such a way that you don't have to try to envision someone towards missional living. It just happens. Nobody really envisioned us. It just happened. I think that's a natural outflow of the gospel.

KP: Perimeter is a large church. How do people get connected to one another and their neighborhoods? Have you organized anything to that end?

DW: Yes, we are a large church and leaders admitted that it was difficult for people to get connected. Our small groups are discipleship groups that are gender-based. We didn't have anything for couples and families. I was asked by leadership to think of a strategy and come up with a philosophy and vision for how we can help our people get connected.

We ended up with Connect Groups, which is our neighborhood thing. I felt very strongly that they would have our unchurched friends and neighbors in mind. Those Connect Group gatherings really should not just be ultra churchy and full of Christian lingo.

KP: How do you not make them ultra churchy?

DW: I took close to a year studying relationships. Who are my friends and why are they my friends? What I discovered (which is kind of a no-brainer) is that the more things you have in common the greater the likelihood that you will be friends. Those commonalities are geography, personality, beliefs, age and stage, interests, music preferences, sports teams, etc. The more things you have in common the greater the likelihood that you will be friends. When forming Connect Groups, in addition to asking people where they live and how old they are, we asked them about their primary interests.

Our group name is Hops and Horticulture. I enjoy craft beer and Laura enjoys gardening. When the other people at church saw the name, they realized that we were serious about the Connect Groups being fun. I think this is one of the weaknesses we have as believers. We don't give ourselves the freedom to have fun. We think that fun means we aren't being focused enough on the mission at hand. But fun is a great attractor to bringing people to faith.



Bring people to the party! Being able to throw a good party is a great strategy for missional living.

[Click here to learn more about [Perimeter Connect Groups](#)]

Drue and Laura have shared a number of writings and resources with The Neighboring Church. Check out our Resources page (www.theneighboringchurch.com/resources) to learn more.

Krista Petty is the Senior Editor of www.theNeighboringChurch.com. Krista and her husband, Steve, have three children and one precious grandson. She has been a connector and storyteller for community transformation and Externally Focused Church movements since 2003.

