Being a Good Neighbor

Ann and Jack Wilson are familiar with the scripture verse, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Even without the prompting of that verse, these two believers have always tried to be good neighbors. They are rather private people but have gone out of their way to enjoy their neighbors and to be there for them in times of need. The primary exception to this neighborly attitude is with the single couple that has lived in the neighborhood longer the Wilsons. While Ann, and to a lesser extent Jack, have been cordial to the couple over the years, it is not likely that the Wilsons would consider their relationship as “neighborly” in the context of the common perception of the Biblical passage.

At a meeting with fellow church members, the topic of discussion was loving your neighbor and making it an integral part of a Christian’s daily life. The topic was prompted by the Church’s decision to use this as a tool in evangelizing in the community. As part of that program, church elders prepared a map of the city with red pins, identifying where each of the church members lived. The objective was to encourage members to reach out to their neighbors and invite them to church. When such an invitation was acted on by a neighbor, a blue pin was posted to show that activity. The church had gone a step further and brought in a representative from the denomination to provide training in just how to engage in witnessing to others.

This outreach program, coupled with the Wilson’s discussion with their fellow church members, prompted Ann and Jack to think about the relations they have with their neighbors. The neighborhood is somewhat unique in that it is in a section of a larger city that has been part of an urban renovation project. The houses are generally large, older structures in an area adjacent to the downtown. Due to the transitional nature of the area, homeowners naturally get to know each other, if for no other reason than to ensure a common safety level. As such, there have been numerous meetings of the neighborhood association that permitted people to get to know each other.

So what is the problem with the couple down the street? The couple, the Gundersons, are in their late 50s. Their three children are married and have moved away from the city. Both are well-educated and, in many ways, very interesting people. For the most part, they keep to themselves. However, their behavior toward their neighbors, except the Wilsons, can often be described as unpleasant at best. A recent example of this situation occurred when there was a concern about a tree that was very near the property line shared by the Gundersons and a neighboring couple who are good friends of the Wilsons. The base of the tree was in the neighbor’s property. Without consulting that couple, the Gundersons trimmed that part of the tree on their side of the fence. The neighbors had no option but to cut the remainder of the tree down as it was both unsightly and likely to die on its own. While to some this may sound
quite trivial, in this older neighborhood, there was considerable pride in these large older trees. This is one of many similar examples of how the Gundersons have alienated their neighbors.

The dilemma for the Wilsons is that the Gundersons’ only friendly contact in the neighborhood is with Ann and Jack. Ann knows of the inappropriate behavior toward the other neighbors but feels it is her responsibility to be cordial to them. Their interactions are limited to informal conversations in the Wilsons’ front yard. In addition, they have been very willing to help out with mail and other small chores around their house when the Wilsons are gone for extended periods of time. Both Ann and Jack agree that the Gundersons would go out of their way to be there for them when a need arose. This interaction, however, is also evident to the neighbors. Both Jack and Ann worry that this overt connection with the Gundersons suggests to the rest of the neighborhood that they approve of the Gundersons’ behavior toward them. A tangible effect of this impression may be an unwillingness on the part of the rest of the neighborhood to respond positively to any witnessing attempt made by the Wilsons.

Ann has asked their church family to provide scriptural guidance to her and her husband as they face this difficult “love your neighbor” challenge. The dilemma is simply deciding how to effectively witness their neighborhood at large while continuing to share their love and faith with the Gundersons at the same time. While there may be some practical solutions, Ann and Jack see the problem more in terms of how to first apply various scripture passages. As a member of their church, what scriptural guidance would you offer to the Wilsons?

**Assignment**

Provide the needed scriptural guidance for the Wilsons as they cope with this “Love thy neighbor” issue.
My Scriptural Research:

Group Scriptural Research:

Decisions / Recommendations:

Primary Scriptural References: