

BIG IDEA

Jesus' mission is to help people find their way back to God, and he lived out the B.L.E.S.S. practices showing us how to live that mission too.

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:15-21, Luke 19:1-10, Genesis 12:1-3, Galatians 3:7-9

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- The passages reveal several important points about God, his people, and Christian mission in the world. The Genesis and Galatians passage show that God has always wanted a people that would be a blessing to the world. God blessed Israel to be a blessing, not so they could have the blessing for themselves. Like Jesus, God wants us to be his people in the world, representing Christ to others.
- The 2 Corinthians passage reveals that a whole new creation has come as a result of Jesus and that we are all a part of what God is doing. He reconciled us to himself (he brought us into his family), and now God's people are to be the most inclusive, peace-loving, and reconciling people on the planet as we welcome others into God's family.
- Living your life to BLESS others is not about adding another event or program to your life. Living the BLESS practices is more about our posture towards others that is prayerful, generous, and hospitable.
- As you live the BLESS practices out with your neighbors, friends, and family, these practices don't always unfold linearly. Be open to the Spirit and what God wants to do in your life.
- Don't put pressure on yourself to make something happen or to get someone to make a faith decision. It's our job to serve others and reflect Jesus to them; outcomes are God's department.

BIG IDEA

In order to BLESS our neighbor, Jesus invites us to begin with prayer.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:12-16

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

Help the group to explore their experience of prayer.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

- John Bunyan once said: “You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.” Jesus knows this, which is why whenever we see Jesus facing a critical decision or an important action, he spends extra time in prayer. Prayer was more important for Jesus than food or rest. Prayer was spiritual food. It is his open secret to being connected with God.
- We often think of the twelve apostles as the only disciples Jesus had, but that is not true. He had hundreds, and maybe thousands of other disciples. Out of them, Jesus chose twelve to give his time, energy, and attention. Those twelve we call apostles, which means “sent ones.”
- God’s way of fulfilling his purposes are not always obvious to our natural way of thinking. According to 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, God chooses the humble, the lowly, the weak, and the meek over the strong, talented, powerful, or the rich. God chooses those we might overlook, so when he works powerfully through them, his power and wisdom are made known among us. If you feel like you are not qualified to be a follower of Jesus or to be a person on mission, you are in good company. God’s people have often fit into this category.

LIFE APPLICATION

- Help the group understand that the goal of prayer is not just to talk to God, but also a time to listen to God and enjoy his presence in silence.
- Sometimes God speaks to us in a loud voice and sometimes in a whisper or a feeling. Help the group recognize there is no single way to “hear” from God.
- Luke 11:1-10 lists a number of ways that prayer can change us: it draws us to God (v2 Father, hallowed be), focuses our priorities (v2 thy kingdom come), reminds us of our dependence on God (v3 gives us each day), Softens our hearts (v4 forgive), keeps us on the right path (v4 lead us not), & moves us into action (v9-10 ask, seek & knock).

CHALLENGE

The challenge for all of us is to set apart some time to pray every day. We don’t have to start by praying all night as Jesus did, not even a whole hour as he asked his disciples to do, but we can all begin by praying at least 5 minutes in the morning and 1 or 2 minutes at night.

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In order to BLESS our neighbor, Jesus invites us to begin with prayer.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:12-16

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

The goal of this is to get everyone talking and sharing something comfortably. The opening thought introduces the main idea of the night, don't worry about getting too deep into the conversation yet, that will come.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

As a group read through the Bible sections slowly. Sometimes it can be helpful to read it in a different translation or read it twice in two different translations. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers in discussing scripture. Be sure to invite everyone to share; it can be intimidating at times for people to discuss the Bible – be sensitive to that.

LIFE APPLICATION

Read the quote and let people share what comes to mind. Listening is a life skill we may think we already do well, but most of could work to cultivate that skill in our relationships. It might just be the thing that our friends, coworkers, family members, and neighbors need.

CHALLENGE

Make a plan this week to truly listen to the people in your life by beginning to pray, "Jesus, help me to listen today." Have a conversation where your only goal is to discover what your friend or colleague needs. As you listen, ask yourself if this is a practical, emotional, or spiritual need? Can you meet their need?

BIG IDEA

In order to BLESS our neighbor, Jesus invites us to share meals together.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 9:9-13

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

Begin with a lighthearted discussion about food and people's favorite meal. Discuss how sharing a meal with people is a great way to get to know one another. We often are not intentional with our meal planning. What if we view our eating as an opportunity to bless someone and be intentional about it? What a difference we could make in the lives of others!

BIBLE STUDY

As you read the passage in Matthew, discuss what Matthew might have been thinking about Jesus' invitation to follow him. Why did he follow him? Discuss what the conversation may have been like at Matthew's house with Jesus and the "sinners." How would it compare to the Pharisees and their interactions with sinners? Jesus is calling them out – memorizing passages, following rituals and shunning who we think of as sinners, or the equivalent of tax collectors in today's society, is not what we are called to do. Jesus lives out the principals he preaches and encourages his followers to do the same.

LIFE APPLICATION

Begin the discussion sharing with one another memories from a special meal. Are there commonalities amongst group members that made the meals special? Can we replicate that to BLESS someone else? Use that discussion to begin to brainstorm what is currently holding us back from inviting others to share a meal. How can we overcome these barriers so that we can help people find their way back to God and not just hope they do!

CHALLENGE

Challenge the group to invite someone that God is calling them to Bless to share in a meal together. Have them share their experiences next week.

BIG IDEA

In order to BLESS our neighbor, Jesus invites us to serve.

TIPS ON LEADING DISCUSSION

1. The icebreaker is designed so anyone can answer the question without having to think about too much. Make this fun and light-hearted.
2. The opening thought will introduce the group to the main point of the conversation.
3. The first verse in the narrative is packed with ideas. The Passover feast was the height of traditional Jewish feasts, and Jesus is applying its meaning to himself. Somehow this feast, Jesus serving them, and the forthcoming crucifixion is the way Jesus is serving and giving himself for his people. We also see that the time had come, which is the moment Jesus' ministry has been building all along. Now Jesus will show the full extent of his love to his disciples.
4. The job of washing feet was reserved for the lowliest of slaves. Some scholars assert that Jewish slaves were exempt from this task. Jesus and his disciples would have reclined at the table with their feet to the outside of their gathering. That means Jesus would have not only humiliated himself with this action, but would have also put himself outside the circle. Those two observations could make for interesting discussion and Jesus and the way the church has been called to follow his example.
5. Conclude the meeting by asking the group members who and how they can BLESS others. Challenge the group to pray and look for ways to serve and then to share the next time you meet.

BIG IDEA

In order to BLESS our neighbor, Jesus invites us to share how our story intersects with God's story.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 10:16-20, John 9:1-15

ICEBREAKER: & OPENING THOUGHT

Help the group to explore their experience of prayer.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

Help the group wrestle with the reality that they 1) don't have to have all the answers 2) sharing their story isn't imposing on people if you've done all the other BLESS practices first 3) Sharing your story is uncomfortable, but that's ok. While the discomfort may be real, the message we are carrying is important enough for a little temporary awkwardness.

LIFE APPLICATION

Take some time before the group to formulate your answer to these three questions for yourself so that you can help start the conversation:

- My Life Before Jesus.
- How I Met Jesus.
- My Life Since I Met Jesus.

CHALLENGE

To bless people, you don't need to be a theological expert or a spiritual giant; you need to share your story. Spend some time this week using this template to craft your story: My Life before Jesus, How I met Jesus, My Life Since I Met Jesus. Write it down and allow God to give you the right words.