

SERIES - HOW TO BLESS YOUR NEIGHBOR Week 1 - The Jesus Mission**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

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

1. Who has been a person who has blessed your life?
2. Opening thought: The mission of our church is helping people find their way back to God. That means we are all part of it, all the time. It might be challenging to think about our role in that mission. If we're not sure what it looks like to be "on mission" then we might be hoping people find their way back to God rather than helping pftwbG. What is the difference between hoping and helping? Explain.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. What is Jesus saying about God's mission and our role in it?
4. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Galatians 3:7-9. God has always wanted his people to be blessed to be a blessing to others. What do you think about that insight?

LIFE APPLICATION

5. Review the BLESS practices; they represent a simple strategy for living our everyday lives on mission. Which of these practices come most naturally to you?
6. Which practices are challenging for you?
7. Is the notion of living your whole life "on mission" a new one for you? If you started living your life in that way, what would be different about your life?
8. Who could you BLESS in your life now? Are there specific ways you could serve them?

CHALLENGE

Living the BLESS practices is not about adding another "thing" to your calendar, but it's a prayerful and generous posture toward the world that looks for opportunities to serve others and share the story of how Jesus is changing our lives. This week, let's pray that God would show us how we can BLESS the people in our lives.

THE BLESS PRACTICES



BEGIN WITH PRAYER

The “B” is for Begin with Prayer. We believe that prayer is how you discover your mission as well as how you accomplish it. If you’re not sure who the people are God is calling you to bless or where the place is God is calling you to go, you can begin with prayer. And if you know people or the place you want to impact, begin praying for those people and that place.



LISTEN

The “L” in BLESS is for Listen. Sadly, most Christians are known for talking more than listening. If we sincerely hope to impact the lives of people around us, then we must first get to know them. Any relationship starts with listening. We need to listen to their hopes, their dreams, and their challenges. Truly listening may be the kindest and most loving gift you can give someone.



EAT

The “E” in BLESS is “Eat.” This third practice is our personal favorite, and it’s something in which many of us are experts—eating! There is something about sharing a meal that moves any relationship past acquaintance toward friendship—faster than just about anything else we can do. And there are few ways we can better bless the people around us than by sharing a meal.



SERVE

The first “S” in BLESS is for “Serve.” We are convinced that if you will begin with prayer, listen, and eat; there is a good chance that by then you will have discovered how you can best serve the person or place to which God has called you. They’ll likely tell you how you can best serve them.



STORY

The second “S” in BLESS is “Story.” Our experience is that if you do the other BLESS practices – Begin with Prayer, Listen, Eat, and Serve; then there is a good chance you will have the opportunity to share your story. Someone may ask you to explain what makes you different. It is then that you can tell them your story of how Jesus changed your life.

BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:12-16

ICEBREAKER AND OPENING THOUGHT

1. What is one particular routine that you especially enjoy in your daily life?
2. Through the years we've discovered that the best way to live the mission of "helping people find their way back to God" is to be a BLESSing to the people and places God puts in our lives. The acronym, BLESS, stands for five missional practices we can do to carry out the Jesus mission every day: Begin with prayer, Listen, Eat together, Serve, and Share your story. How comfortable are you with prayer?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

3. Read Luke 6:12-16. What do you notice about this passage?
4. Jesus often withdrew alone to pray to discern his next steps. (see Luke 3:21, 5:16, 9:16a, 22:32, & 22:41). Does Jesus' example encourage or discourage you? Explain.
5. Jesus did not choose as followers those who everyone liked the most or even the obvious choices. For some reason, he chose fishermen, tax collectors, a religious zealot, and a man who would later betray him. Why might this important?

LIFE APPLICATION

6. What is your expectation and experience of prayer?
7. In what ways does prayer change us?

The message gave us a three-step guide for prayer this week:

- Plan: If we want to be intentional about setting time apart to pray, we need to put it on our calendar and set a time to pray. How do you feel about being that intentional about prayer?
 - Prepare: As you pray, ask God to prepare your heart for the adventure. Ask God to give you eyes to see people with compassion. Can you share a time when you've prayed, and God has directed you towards someone?
 - Places/People: As you pray, make a mental map of the places you will visit for the day. Who are some of the people that you will encounter? Maybe God has already put in your heart a place or people that you are supposed to BLESS. Pray for those places, pray for those people, and ask God for an opportunity to BLESS.
8. There will be days that nothing will happen, so don't give up. There were will other days when something will happen. What are some places you want to pray for God to provide opportunities?

CHALLENGE

The challenge is to set apart some time to pray every day. We don't have to start by praying all night as Jesus did, or 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.

BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:35-43

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

1. Have you ever misread a lyric, like really misheard? Would you sing the song as you'd heard it?
2. Christ-followers are known more for talking than for listening. Additionally, as a society, we seem to be losing the skill of listening, treating it as an afterthought instead of a vital part of relationships. The art of having a conversation requires deep thinking and authentic listening, something that can be cultivated and taught. What do you think it takes to be a good listener?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

3. Read Luke 18:35-43, what stood out to you?
4. Read John 5:1-9, what struck you about this interaction with Jesus?
5. If Jesus, the Son of God, stopped to listen to the people around him, what's stopping us?

LIFE APPLICATION

6. Read this quote from David Augsburger and discuss your experience with being heard:

"Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable."

7. We often fake-listen, just waiting for our turn to talk or to turn the conversation to something that affects us. How hard is it to listen without actively formulating a response?
8. Listening is a humbling act; it requires admitting that perhaps we can't anticipate what the other person wants to talk about or that maybe their needs are different than we'd thought. What does it feel like to actively listen?

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?

SERIES - HOW TO BLESS YOUR NEIGHBOR

Week 4 - Eat

BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 9:9-13

ICEBREAKER

If you had to eat the same meal once every day for the rest of your life, what would it be?

OPENING THOUGHT

To live out our mission to help people find their way back to God, we can use the BLESS acronym. This week we focus on “E” for eating. Often in our culture, and many others, sharing a meal is a great way to get to know someone better. Eating isn’t just another item on the to-do list, but it is often something we enjoy and do multiple times a day! How can we be a blessing to someone while we eat?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Read Matthew 9:9-13. Why do you think that Matthew followed him? What do you think they discussed at Matthew’s house?
2. In this passage, what could Jesus mean by, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick? But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
3. Read the Henri Nouwen quote below and discuss how it intersects with Jesus method of “eating with sinners.”

“When we invite friends for a meal, we do much more than offer them food for their bodies. We offer friendship, fellowship, good conversation, intimacy, and closeness. When we say, ‘Help yourself... take some more... don’t be shy... have another glass...’ we offer our guests not only our food and drink but also ourselves. A spiritual bond grows, and we become food and drink for one another.” -Henri J.M. Nouwen

LIFE APPLICATION

4. Share a time that you had a meal with someone that you remember as being a special event for you or your relationship. What made it so special?
5. What are the barriers in your life that may keep you from inviting someone to share a meal with you? How might you break down some of those barriers?
6. How often do you share a meal with someone during the week? Are there times that you could invite others to join you that wouldn’t be too difficult?
7. Who comes to your mind when we discuss our mission of helping people find their way back to God? How could you plan to bless them through eating?

CHALLENGE

Who has God been calling you to bless and help to find their way back to him? Continue to pray for them, listen to them, and this week, invite them to share a meal with you. Next week share with the group how it went.

“There is something profoundly satisfying about sharing a meal. Eating together, breaking bread together, is one of the oldest and most fundamentally unifying of human experiences.” - Barbara Coloroso

BIG IDEA

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

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

1. What is one task that you hate and like to avoid?
2. Today we are talking about serving others to BLESS them. When you hear the word serve, what comes to mind?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

3. Read John 13:1-17. What details stand out to you about this story?
4. Some biblical scholars assert that foot washing was reserved for only the lowliest slaves. In what ways does Jesus example come into conflict with our cultural values?
5. Jesus lived in a cultural setting that was considered an honor-shame society. Protecting your name, your reputation, and your dignity is critically important in an honor-shame culture. Your honor was like a social credit rating. The higher your honor score, the more privilege and prestige you enjoy. If you had a high honor score, other people were expected to serve you. What does Jesus' action reveal about the nature of God?

LIFE APPLICATION

6. What would be some contemporary equivalents to washing another person's feet in our culture today?
7. How can we cultivate a posture of readiness to serve others in big and small ways?
8. Who are some people you could serve? How could you reach out to them? How could you be in a posture of readiness?

CHALLENGE

This story foreshadows the death of Christ on the cross, where we see the ultimate act of love. This love has been changing the world for the last 2,000 years, and the most vivid picture of love we can paint is to serve others the way Jesus served us. May we know the love of God through Christ. May we learn to value the things Jesus values. May we be a people who seek not to be served but to serve others.

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

1. How can you tell when your spouse, mom, or kids are angry with you? What are their non-verbal cues?
2. There are so many ways we communicate without words, and when it comes to helping people find their way back to God, most of us hope we can do it without words. Why do you think we so often hold back from sharing our story?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

3. Read Matthew 10:16-20. What do you notice about this passage?
4. In verses 19-20, Jesus tells his disciples that the Spirit will guide them in their speech. How difficult is it for you to trust that God can guide us in our conversations?
5. Read John 9:1-15. What do you notice about this passage?
6. How would you describe the newly sighted man's words?

LIFE APPLICATION

7. D.T. Niles said, "Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread". How do you understand that statement?
8. The newly sighted man from John 9 laid out a simple template for sharing your story. Take the rest of the time giving everyone a chance to share these three components of their story:
 - a. My Life before Jesus: The man declared "I was blind". What was your life like before you met Jesus? Or if you grew up in church knowing all about Jesus, what was your life like before you got serious about following him? Your story begins with who you were ...
 - b. How I met Jesus: The man declared, "He put mud on my eyes". How you met Jesus is an important part of your story. How did you find your way back to God? Did a friend invite you to church, a family member introduce you to Jesus? Did you go through a hard time?
 - c. My Life Since I met Jesus: "Oh, I was blind... But now I see". What difference has finding your way back to God made in your life? How are you different? What has changed about your perspective? How has knowing Jesus impacted how you walk through both the good and the hard things in life?

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.