



JOURNEY GROUP GUIDE

// HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

B.L.E.S.S. is a new way of thinking about loving our neighbors. B.L.E.S.S. is five missional practices that help us introduce people to Jesus. By using these practices outward to include people who may be far from God, we can bless and bring people to a new life in Jesus. Every one of us can easily and naturally live out the five BLESS missional practices with unchurched people.



e in prayer



isten with compassion



at together



erve together



hare your story

Whether the group you're meeting with has been together for several years, or is just starting out, the discussion provided within these pages can help you begin to discover how we can all be part of the kingdom work that God has called us to do.

Note that B.L.E.S.S. is not meant to create a new list of do's and don'ts. Bringing your neighbor to Jesus may happen over the next six weeks and it could take years for your unchurched friend to accept Jesus. But rest assured, Jesus is already at work blessing the unchurched, drawing them into Him, working in them to convict them of His love. We are assistant "blessers," working for and with the Holy Spirit, which is very encouraging!



// BEGIN WITH TRANSFORMING PRAYER

September 11-17, 2022

Read Chapters 1-3

THE BIG IDEA

This week we are going to explore how we have been blessed by Jesus and others in prayer. We begin with “prayer” to bless those in our lives who are far away from God. God has blessed us through prayer, and we too can bless others who are far from God through prayer.

BEGIN WITH TRANSFORMING PRAYER

When we hear the word “cultivate” a certain agricultural picture may come to mind. You might think of soil being prepared, turned over, and broken loose so that it is ready to receive a seed and foster the growth of new crops. Hearts can be cultivated in the same way, and prayer is the means by which this happens.

As we pray, our own hearts are cultivated and God prepares us to see opportunities to join Him in helping people connect with Jesus. As He brings about this awareness in us, He will also begin to equip us to do this work. We will begin to see our opportunities and abilities grow as we pray that God would use us.

When we pray, the hearts of others are also cultivated. We are brought into the much larger work that the Holy Spirit is doing in people’s hearts and lives. We can witness hearts softened and minds opened to receive the good news of Jesus Christ.

READ [COLOSSIANS 4:2-4](#)

1. These verses were part of a letter Paul wrote to the church in Colossae while imprisoned. If you were in prison, what do you think you’d be asking for in prayer? As a person facing extreme hardships, are you surprised by how Paul is encouraging his readers to pray?

2. What are some characteristics of a person who is devoted to something? What does it look like to be devoted to prayer?

***“We should
be talking to
God about
our neighbors
before we talk
to our neighbors
about God.”***



***To say that
“prayer changes
things” is not
as close to
the truth as
saying, “Prayer
changes me and
then I change
things.” God
has established
things so that
prayer, on
the basis of
redemption,
changes the
way a person
looks at things.
Prayer is not
a matter of
changing things
externally, but
one of working
miracles in a
person’s inner
nature.***

***// Charles
Spurgeon***

3. What do you think Paul meant in asking that he be able to proclaim his message clearly? How might his message be unclear?

JESUS PRAYS FOR US (ROMANS 8:34b-35)

We bless others through prayer because we have been blessed through prayer. We are *blessed* to bless others! In Scripture, we see how Jesus prays for us out of the same love that led Him to die for us.

Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

DISCUSSION

1. Do you believe Jesus is praying for you right now? Why or why not?
2. What do you think Jesus might be praying for you at this stage of your life?
3. What might Jesus be praying for one or two unchurched people in your life whom He loves and wants to reach?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Why do you think “being in prayer” is the first of the BLESS practices?
2. Why do you think it is so difficult for us to devote ourselves to prayer? Are there any misconceptions we have about prayer that contribute to lack of devotion?



3. What are some of the barriers that might come up as you begin praying regularly for people near us? How can we, as a group, support each other as we “begin with transforming prayer” for these individuals?

FRANC MODEL

Use the following model to help you pray for and bless people in your spheres of influence where you live, work and play.

1. Friends
2. Relatives
3. Acquaintances
4. Neighbors
5. Co-workers and colleagues

Ask God to bring to mind 3-5 people to pray for daily and write their names below.

Here are some ways you can pray for these individuals:

Pray for _____ to become thirsty for God. ([John 7:37-39](#))

Pray for _____ to become open to change.
([2 Corinthians 7:10](#))

Pray for _____ to clearly experience God’s love.
([1 John 4:7-10](#), [19-21](#))

Pray for _____ to develop deep spiritual rootedness in Christ. ([John 15:5](#); [Colossians 2:6-7](#))

Just as we are praying for others, here are some ways we can be in prayer for ourselves.

Pray that God would open a door for the message to be heard.
([Colossians 2:3](#))

Pray that God would provide opportunities to speak boldly.
([Acts 28:31](#))

PRAYER

Lord, help us to ask and keep on asking, to seek and keep on seeking, and to knock and keep on knocking when it comes to praying for our unchurched family and friends. You promise that if we are persistent, you will answer. You promise that if we cry out to you, you are good and will respond. You promise to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. And you promise to convict and draw people toward you by your Holy Spirit.



// THE ART OF LISTENING

September 18-24, 2022

Read Chapter 4

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus and others have listened to you, heard you, and valued who you are. We bless others who are far from God by listening to, hearing, and valuing their stories that reveal who they are. In this way, we help them take another step toward Jesus.

THE ART OF LISTENING

Listening with compassion means we don't just *hear* the words someone is saying to us. We are active listeners who begin to understand the needs this person has, the past that has shaped their present, and how we might be able to bring the hope of Jesus into their life. Listening with compassion requires more than just a listening ear - although that is very important. It also requires a heart that is open to using these conversations to be a blessing to others.

Listening often goes against what we're inclined to do when we're in conversation with another person. Being a good listener requires practice and intentionality and doesn't typically come naturally, but it is worth practicing! The better we become at listening, the more comfortable people will be around us, and the more likely they'll be to open up and share their story with us.

As followers of Jesus, listening to the Holy Spirit is also vital when we are helping people connect with Jesus. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us, and He is the one who is at work in the people's lives on our prayer list. When we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, He reveals opportunities to listen to others and serve them in love.

READ [MARK 9:14-27](#).

1. Jesus seemed to have a way of asking questions to help people tell their story and reveal their heart. In [Mark 9:21](#), Jesus asked a father whose son suffered with seizures, "How long has he been like this?" Do you think Jesus knew the answer to this question? Why did Jesus ask it?

2. What are some questions that we could use to draw out stories from someone, especially as it relates to their spiritual journey?

Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.

***// Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
Life Together***



3. Which of these - listening to God, listening to others, or listening for an opportunity - do you think is most challenging? Why?

DISCUSSION

1. When have you cried out to Jesus, and felt that he listened, heard you, responded, and that He valued you?

2. In what ways do you need to grow in listening to others and showing that you value them?

3. In your life, who is far from God right now that you want to listen to more deeply, and to care for and value?

4. In what ways do you hunger to learn better how to listen to God and look for clues of His work in the lives of your friends and family who are far from God?

This READ strategy can help you hear others well:

We all know someone that dominates the conversation and many times, makes us feel unheard and unimportant. Which of the following listening skills do you need to focus on more?

Repeat what the person shared until they let you know they feel heard.

Experience - name the emotions the other person experienced in the story they shared.

Affirm every true thing you can about their position or experience.

Disclose - only now do you “disclose” your view or offer a challenge.

Most people are deeply attracted to someone who will listen to them. Being available means being willing to focus my attention on the person or people God has placed right in front of me.

***// Paul
Borthwick,
Everyday Witness***



PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a moment to reflect on the Scripture passage, questions, and exercises from this week's session and write down your thoughts. Here are a few questions to guide you. Share with your small group what you sense God saying to you.

1. What are you hearing God say to you?
2. How do you want to respond?
3. What steps will you take?
4. What do you want us to ask you about next week as a way to encourage you and keep you accountable during our time together?

PRAYER

Lord, help us to listen to others and to you. We want to bless others by listening, responding, and valuing them. We want to hear about the experiences in their lives, and we want to hear and see what you are doing in their lives so we can collaborate with you. Lord, thank you that you have listened to us and loved and valued us. We want to bless others.



// COME TO THE TABLE

September 25-October 1, 2022

Read Chapter 5

THE BIG IDEA

In order to reach those who are far from God, Jesus ate and enjoyed community with people who were marginalized and excluded by the religious leaders of His day. We can bless others who are far from God by eating and enjoying community with them. When we eat together with non-Christians, we extend hospitality and invite them to taste God's kingdom. In this way, we help people take another step toward Jesus.

How do we practice hospitality and create community with those who don't know Jesus yet? Eating together is one way we can be hospitable and enjoy community with people

COME TO THE TABLE

Imagine a table. It might be set with a tablecloth, patterned dishes and silverware. Or perhaps there are simply paper plates, plastic cups, and forks. Now imagine the chairs set up around the table, the people sitting in them, the laughter and conversations being passed back and forth just like the dishes of food passing between hands. Or perhaps there isn't laughter but the tough things of life being discussed - brokenness making its way out into the open.

When we sit around a table and share a meal with others, we have the opportunity to move a relationship from acquaintance toward friendship. The table can be a great equalizer. Everyone has a place and an opportunity to be heard and known while sharing in the intimacy of a meal. Eating together provides an opportunity to develop relational bridges, discover people's stories, and discern the next steps in helping them connect with Jesus.

READ [LUKE 5:27-32](#).

1. Tax collectors were despised in the Jewish community, and for good reason! They often collected more money than was required from Rome and became very wealthy because of it. What did Jesus see in these individuals that others did not? Why did he choose to associate with them?



2. Why do you think Levi felt the need to throw a party with Jesus invited as the guest? Wouldn't you think he would have set up a lecture hall for his friends to listen to Jesus? What is so important about this relational component leading the way?

3. How did Jesus' posture toward tax collectors like Levi, ultimately result in them leaving behind their sinful ways and following Him? What can we learn from His example?

4. What do you think Levi and his friends thought of the Pharisees? What do you think are some of the perceptions people today have of "religious folks?" How could eating together begin to change their perspective?

DISCUSSION

1. Jesus faced criticism for eating with tax collectors and other "undesirable" individuals. What can we learn from His response in verses 31-32? How can this response compel us to reach out to and spend time with those that are far away from Jesus?

2. Jesus was obviously able to associate with sinners without sinning. What needs to be in place in our own lives so that we can do the same?

3. What do you see as some of the challenges to the practice of "eating together?" Are there any hesitations you're feeling about this practice?

***I'm convinced
that our dinner
tables have
the potential
to be the most
"missional"
places in all
of our lives.
Perhaps before
we invite people
to Jesus or
invite them
to church, we
should invite
them to dinner.***

// Barry D. Jones



PERSONAL REFLECTION

Ask God whom you should invite to the table. Call or text that person to pencil in time on your calendar for a coffee, lunch or dinner. Go ahead and think about some questions and topics of conversation to address while eating together.

Reflect on these skills of hospitality and how you may direct them toward someone on your B.L.E.S.S. list over a meal:

- Identify common interests and celebrate them.
- Notice what people like and don't like, and act on what you learn.
- Identify something in the other person that you admire, remembering that they were made in God's image.
- Anticipate people's needs and try to meet them.
- Notice and receive the gifts people give you.

PRAYER

Lord, where have you sent me, and whom do you want me to bless? Open my eyes to see who you want me to be hospitable toward and to include in a meal. Show me who to invite for dinner, lunch, or coffee. Help me to include those who are often excluded from our community. Give me the time, the courage, and the compassion to reach out and invite those who have been left out. Help me become more like you, Jesus.



// GRAB A TOWEL

October 2-8, 2022

Read Chapter 6

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus serves us so that we can bless others by serving them in practical and sometimes sacrificial ways. Others experience God's love and invitation through our acts of kindness and practical service.

GRAB A TOWEL

The story of a paralyzed man told in [Luke 5](#) is one you may know. Jesus was teaching in a home, and people were crowded in to hear His words. There was no room to move, no way to squeeze in any closer. A paralyzed man, having heard of the miracles that Jesus had performed, wished to see Him. He had a glimpse of hope that he might be released from his disability, but it was still unreachable because of the crowd.

Then we see an act of service by some of his friends. They create a way for the paralyzed man to meet Jesus. These friends carry the man up to the roof, they dig through the roof and create an opening, and then they lower him down so that he is right in front of Jesus. These friends created a way for the paralyzed man to not only meet Jesus but experience His love, forgiveness, and healing first-hand.

When we serve in love, we have the opportunity to do the same thing. Sometimes our service looks very practical - shoveling someone's driveway, bringing a meal during sickness, or helping complete a home improvement project. Other times our service looks more like being present during moments of crisis or being willing to answer the hard questions someone has about faith.

READ [LUKE 5:17-26](#).

1. What role did the men carrying the mat have in bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus? How did they remove the obstacles that were in his way?

2. Serving others sometimes comes at great cost. For example, the men in the story had to cut a hole in the roof that would most likely need to be repaired. What are some of the costs we may pay when we serve others in love?

***Let my life be
the proof,
The proof of
Your love.***

***Let my love
look like You
and what You're
made of.***

***How You
lived, how You
died, Love is a
sacrifice.***

***So let my life be
the proof, The
proof of your
love.***

***// For King and
Country
The Proof of Your
Love***



***The only way to
serve God is by
serving other
people.***

// Rick Warren

3. How did Jesus serve the paralyzed man in love?

4. What is our role and what is God's role in serving others? How do they differ?

DISCUSSION

There are several examples in Scripture of people helping others meet Jesus by serving in love. Choose one or two of these passages to read as a group. As you read these verses, they will help you understand why it is so important that we serve others in love.

Jesus Heals Many

([Mark 1:32-34](#))

A Blind Man at Bethsaida

([Mark 8:22-26](#))

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

([Matthew 9:1-2](#))

Jesus Raises a Dead Girl

([Matthew 9:18-19](#))

A Demon-Possessed Man

([Matthew 9:32-33](#))

The Good Samaritan

([Luke 10:25-37](#))

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Ask God whom you could serve in love this week.



2. Listen to God for whomever you want to serve, asking how God might be at work in their lives and how you might be part of that. Learn the skills of true service - how to help people in ways that feed dignity and communicate love the way they can hear it. Which items in the list below most stand out to you? Why? Can you think of a concrete example of serving in that way?

- Affirming someone's strengths and character
- Showing kindness
- Giving gifts
- Meeting concrete needs
- Giving practical help with tasks
- Engaging in courageous conversations that speak truth in love
- Believing in a person's potential
- Grieving together
- Expressing value to people who might not be valued by society or your community
- Serving in the community together with unchurched friends or acquaintances

PRAYER

Lord, you have loved and served me both in small ways and with the gift of your life. Whom do you want me to bless? Open my eyes to see who you want me to serve in practical ways. Show me who I can serve in love. Help me include those who are often excluded from our community. Give me the time, the courage, and the compassion to serve those who have been left out. Help me become more like you, Jesus.

***For next week:
go to www.iamsecond.com. Take time
to watch a
few videos of
people's stories
and be ready to
discuss one or
two that stuck
out to you.***



// WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

October 9-15, 2022

Read Chapters 7-9

THE BIG IDEA

Stories inspire and change us. We have read stories from others and Jesus that nurtured our souls and inspired our hearts. In the same way, we share our stories about what God and others have done for us and how those acts have made a difference in our lives with others. We begin by remembering how God has blessed us and who might want to hear our story. Then we share our story of how God is changing us and in turn, changing the world!

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Stories hold a lot of power. They have the power to change opinions, create empathy, provide clarity, and bring transformation. Our personal stories are unique and essential tools in helping others understand how Jesus impacts lives in real and tangible ways. Through stories, people can begin to believe that change is possible and hope is evident. They can start to understand what love looks like and that true, lasting, selfless love can be theirs to experience through a relationship with Jesus.

The final practice of B.L.E.S.S. is to share a story. Sometimes a personal story of how God worked in our lives is the best one to share. Other times, someone else's story will connect most strongly with the person we're trying to reach. Either way, we are presenting our listeners with a gift when we share a story.

Sharing stories can sometimes take us outside our comfort zone as we open up about how Jesus has worked in our lives. As we think about stories to share, we can be comforted by the fact that the Holy Spirit is at work as we share. He is the one that ultimately softens hearts so our message can be heard. We can trust Him to work through us as we come alongside the work that He is already doing in the hearer's heart.

READ [ACTS 22:3-16](#).

1. What was Paul's life like before his encounter with Jesus? In what ways was he far away from Him? Do you think he recognized this distance from God before his encounter on the road? Why do you think it was hard for Paul to see how far he was from God?



Because God gave you your makeup and superintended every moment of your past, including all the hardship, pain and struggles, He wants to use your words in a unique manner. No one else can speak through your vocal cords, and, equally important, no one else has your story.

// Chuck Swindoll

2. How did God use Ananias in Paul's story? (See [Acts 9:10-19](#)) What reasons did Ananias have to avoid being involved in Paul's story? Were his fears reasonable?

3. How did Paul use his personal story to help others meet Jesus?

DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think stories are so powerful? In what ways do stories help build relationships?

2. What unique experiences, perhaps hard and difficult, has God given you, that help you identify and connect with other people?

3. There is a way to tell a life story where we are the heroes, and another way to tell the story with God as the hero. Which is more common? Which is more truthful?

4. What might keep us from sharing our story? Fear of rejection? The feeling that our story isn't "powerful enough?" Other?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

When you think about the people on your prayer list, what story from your own life could you share that would help them understand the transforming power of Jesus?

Take time to think about and write down some stories from your life. Think about how God has worked in the situations where you have experienced pain, hopelessness, or fear. Maybe it was a time before you knew Jesus and you'd like to share what your life was like during that time?

A model to follow when sharing your story of Jesus' love encompassing your heart is below:

- What was my life and attitudes like before meeting Jesus?
- How I realized God was speaking to me.
- How I received Jesus as my Lord?
- What being a Christ follower means to me?

A way to remember this is using the acronym **BJ - C - AJ**.

BJ - Before Jesus - in just a few words, explain what condition you were in before you gave your life to Jesus. It might be "empty". Include all the ways you tried to solve your problem - busyness, drugs or alcohol, or using my own will to solve it.

C - Conversion - Briefly tell how you came to Jesus.

AJ - After Jesus - what has changed? Maybe your emptiness was replaced with purpose? Maybe you have found healing in His love rather than a bottle? Share how you are different now than before meeting Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, you are changing our lives through your deep love for us and by your Spirit who indwells all who love and follow you. Thank you! Thank you that you are continually at work in the world and in our lives, changing us and helping us become more like you. Thank you that you have redeemed us and that we often have new stories of your work in our lives and the world. Whom do you want us to bless? Open our eyes to see who it is you want us to share our story of how you are changing us and the world! Deepen our relationships with those who do not know you, that we might have the privilege of blessing them and, in time, introducing them to You.