



Series Overview: We will help each person understand our mission to reach the lost, restore the broken, reproduce disciples that make disciples. And release disciples into Jesus' mission. Each person will have a clear understanding of “B.L.E.S.S.” as how we pursue the Jesus Mission as well as how we discover our own particular and unique part in Jesus' Mission. Each week we will focus on a particular story from Jesus' life that demonstrates his mission and how he fulfilled it through B.L.E.S.S.ing others.

Week 1 – The Jesus Mission

Big Idea:

“What do I have to do tomorrow?” I've got a whole long list of stuff I have to do. A list so long it is probably impossible for me to ever get it done.

How about you, “What do you have to do tomorrow?” While I try to check off a few more “have-to's” turn to someone near you and ask them: “What do you have to do tomorrow?” And then listen for their response.

So to get us started - what did you say was on your have-to list for tomorrow? (“have”) Key word is have; have to do? Maybe you got some place you have to be tomorrow. Maybe you said something about work you didn't get done and now you have to finish it? Or that you have go to the doctor, or the grocery store, or the DMV? That's the worst! There are so many things you have to do!

In Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis, one of the great thinkers of the last century wrote this: “Each morning when you wake up, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals.” This is SOOOO right on, isn't it? But for most of us it's not so much “wishes and hopes” as it is just the same old stuff I always have to do!

I meet a lot of people who have long lists of “have-to's” and very little passion or purpose. I especially notice it in guys. I was talking to a friend of mine who was complaining about how he has to do the same old stuff every day. You know what I'm talking about? He explained...

You have to get up at the same old time, shut off the same old alarm clock. You have to walk into the same old bathroom; look at the same old face in the same old mirror; get in the same old shower, dry off with the same old towel and put on the same old clothes.



You have to walk down to the same old kitchen; get out the same old bowl; eat the same old cereal; drink the same old coffee; read the same old paper; kiss good-bye the same old wife (he said that, not me!).

Then you have to drive the same old car down the same old road to the same old job; and do the same old work, and laugh at the same old jokes the same old boss tells the same old way.

You clock out at the same old time; have to get back in the same old car and drive down that same old road; pull in the same old garage; hug the same old kids, walk into that same old kitchen and sit down eat the same old dinner.

Finally, you walk into the same old family room; and sit in the same old recliner, watch the same old Wheel of Fortune; fall asleep in that same old chair; have to get up and crawl into that same old bed; ask that same old wife that same old question; get that same old answer; (pause) roll over, (pause) set the same old alarm clock and get up the next day -- and do the same old thing ALL OVER AGAIN.

Too many people think that's how they have to do life! I DON'T WANT THE "SAME OLD!" DO YOU? We've got one shot at this deal. I want wake up every morning with passion and purpose! Sure, there are lots of things you "have to do." But I believe, by God's design there are also things that you HAVE to do! ("have" "HAVE") I believe that when God birthed you, he birthed you with a dream – something that you and only you HAVE to do with your life!

Frederick Beuchner said, ("have" passion->"HAVE"<-need) "Our calling is where our greatest passion meets the world's greatest need." (2x) I believe that somewhere near the intersection of your passion and the world's need is your MISSION. And if you'll journey with us for the next five weeks of this series my hope is that every one of us will discover a mission so compelling you simply HAVE to do it! /(swipe/

Let's begin with a famous story where Jesus talks about something he just had to do. The beginning of the story often goes un-noticed, but it starts like this (John 4:4): "Now Jesus HAD to go through Samaria..." We could read it one of 2 ways. We could read it like this: "Jesus had to go through Samaria." Like it was a have to, a "same old." Like he had no other choice. No option. OR, we could read it like this: "Jesus HAD to go through Samaria..." Because there was a compelling cause! There was a reason; something inside him saying, "I HAVE to go there!"

A little homework tells us that there must have been a compelling cause because normally Jews avoided Samaria at all costs. Samaritans were hated. They were the enemy. Samaritans were to Jews what Packer fans are to Bears fans. ☺ I hope the Packers do well in the playoffs...NO I DON'T.



Anyway, when the Bible says that Jesus HAD to go through Samaria - what makes this statement so striking is that Jesus really did not have to go through Samaria. He could have taken the route that every other Jew took to go around Samaria. But Jesus HAD to go through Samaria because of a mission God had given Him; there was a woman he just had to meet.

Jesus meets this Samaritan woman at a well . . . she was there at a very odd time, when no one else was there. It was like she was trying to avoid being noticed. Little background on this woman - she had been married 5 different times and guy #6 that she was currently living with was not her husband. She was either a person with a very questionable reputation OR because of her failures she had been rejected by her community...and maybe both!

It was for her that Jesus said, I HAVE to go where no one else wants to go. He was on mission. He was going to reach her and restore her. He didn't care that she was a Samaritan. He didn't care that she was a woman with a questionable reputation. He didn't care that the rest of the community had rejected her.

In spite of all that, Jesus not only engaged her in conversation; he treated with her with dignity; and he loved her! And in so doing, Jesus changed her life. She went from being someone who came to the well at the hottest time of day to avoid being noticed by anyone; to a woman so compelled by the love of Jesus, she went back into town to tell everyone else about the life-changing experience she had. The Bible says she left her water jar, went back into town, and told her neighbors, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29).

So what makes this story so important? Well, this story offers you and me some very important discoveries: First, we discover that Jesus had a mission. Jesus, himself had a cause that was so compelling he woke up everyday thinking, "This is what I HAVE to do!" Second, we discover that we have a mission! As Christ followers, Jesus mission is our mission; so we too have a compelling cause; we have something we HAVE to do! Lastly we discover that the Jesus mission is made up of 3 life-changing and world-changing elements. Let me explain...

The first element is REACH (circle with "reach") and it's about reaching people far from God. The Samaritan woman was far from God. And by far from God it doesn't mean that she is not spiritual. She is definitely spiritual. She has spiritual questions; spiritual interests and spiritual longings. We are all fundamentally spiritual beings. But she had not yet found her way back to God...and that is why Jesus was there.



She is a lot like a guy named Jack. Looking back, Jack has always been a spiritually minded person. As a kid his parents took him to church. He's always had spiritual questions, spiritual interests and spiritual longings. As an adult he was in and out of church. But because he was abused as a kid and rejected by those who should of loved him most Jack started drinking...a lot. Doing drugs...a lot. Jack tried to escape his painful past of abuse and failure through drugs and alcohol. This escape made him forget all that...for a while. But this escape eventually ended him up jobless, homeless and all alone. Jack was living out of a local YMCA.

Even though Jack had been raised in the church, considered himself spiritual, he now found himself in a place that was very far from God. It was the influence of a few friends that got him started on his path to sobriety and reaching out to a higher power. It was 2 years ago that his search brought him to church and to a small group. And it was there that Jack took a huge step on his spiritual journey. Last month Jack asked if he could be baptized. When Jack was asked why he wanted to get baptized he said, “This is to let people know I found my way back to God...and that I've found a mission for my life!” Jack, like the Samaritan woman was far from God and now has been reached!

And everyday there are people like Jack and the Samaritan woman around me and you. They are in our family. They are in our neighborhood. We work with them; we go to school with them; and they are all around us while we are doing the “same old stuff.” They are people like just like me; people just like you - just people who are still far from God! Jesus wants us to reach them. Our mission is to reach them.

If the first element is REACH and it's about reaching people far from God. (circle with “restore”) The second world-changing element of the Jesus mission is RESTORE and it's all about restoring God's dream in this world. God's dream and desire for all of us from the very beginning is for us to live in perfect relationship with Him and with each other. There were people in the Samaritan woman's life that claimed to love her, but only used her; because of that AND because of the choices she made the dream God had for her life was shattered!

And there are people all around us like her - living life in situations far less than what God ever dreamed. Some because of their choices AND some because of unjust people who should have loved them: Might be that person you pass whose living on the street. Might be that person who struggles with an addiction and has yet to hit bottom.

Some of them are people who are have been marginalized or forgotten: Like the single mom trying to raise kids on a poverty-level income. Or the refugee who is all alone and trying to make a home. Or maybe the child who doesn't have access to a good education simply because of the neighborhood he



lives in. Anytime you see someone living their life in a condition or circumstances that is less than God dreamed, know this – Jesus wants to restore God’s dream for their life. Our mission is to restore them.

The eternity-altering and world-changing elements of Jesus mission include REACHING, RESTORING and lastly REPRODUCING (circle with “reproduce”) this mission in the lives of others. And that is exactly what happened in the life of the Samaritan woman. In verse 39 we read something amazing. It says this woman who was far from God and an outcast from her people is the very one who takes the mission to her community. Look what it says, “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony.” She no longer wakes up thinking, “Go get water – that’s what I have to do.” Now she has something in her life where she wakes up every morning knowing, “That is what I HAVE to do!” RELEASE. Jesus released people into mission. We will explore your part of Jesus’ mission in the weeks to come.

Pastors: Give an example here of how your church or you have reached, restored and reproduced a disciple who is on mission.

So, please hear me on this: whatever you discover as your mission, make sure that you apprentice at least one other person. If it’s reaching out to kids or students – reproduce the mission in someone else! If it’s volunteering for a local food bank – bring someone alongside you! If you got your own start-up idea – do it, but don’t do it alone! For the mission to be accomplished we can’t keep it to ourselves, we have to reproduce it in others.

And when you put this all together you can clearly see the Jesus Mission. (JESUS MISSION ----->)
It’s when as individuals and as a church we do all 3: reach, restore and reproduce. You understand that? Good! But I always want to push you beyond just understanding to action! So, let me ask you a question and then say something I’ve never said since we started Name of Your Church.

Question: What is our mission statement at Name of Your Church? Turn to someone near you and give it your best shot. (wait) Good chance you just heard someone say to you or someone near you say, “helping people find their way back to God.” (hpftwbTG) (Or Your Church’s Mission Statement). And that is correct. That is our mission!

Now, I want to say something that we have not said in the Number of year history of Name of Your Church. Here it is: This is not just our churches mission, as a Christ follower this is your mission! It is no longer acceptable as a Christ follower to just KNOW about the Jesus Mission. We want every person ON MISSION. We are raising the bar starting now! And not to a new standard just for us; but to the same



standard that Jesus had for his followers. In the Bible there was no such thing as a follower of Jesus who was not fully engaged in the mission of Jesus. Their conversion was also a commitment to the mission. Their baptism was their ordination!

So, if you are a Christ follower you have a mission! Here it is! (point to diagram) Bottom line! /(swipe)/

And we want to help you discover your part of this mission. Some of you, like me - are going to discover that your mission is in your neighborhood. Others your mission is your workplace or school. Still others your mission is a particular cause or community that God has called you too. There is going to be a myriad of missions that will all help people find their way back to God! And we want to support you, encourage you and cheer for you! I have met with our pastors/staff/leaders and we all have agreed that the highest priority goal we have for Name of Your Church this year is this: **THAT BY THE END OF 2017 EVERY PERSON HAS A MISSION STORY TO TELL.** (2x)

I hope you'll be here every weekend during this series. As we study the life of Jesus we are going to discover that His strategy to change the world was the same strategy that God asked Abraham to use to change the world – the blessing strategy from Genesis 12:3: “I will bless you...and through you all the nations of the world will be blessed.” And this blessing strategy can be summarized in 5 missional practices. And so that we can remember these 5 missional practices of Jesus – they form an acronym that spells B.L.E.S.S. (B.L.E.S.S.) We are going to explain one each week of this series. Now, I'm not going to tell you what these 5 missional practices are – got to come back next week to get that! Yes, it's a teaser. But I guarantee! I absolutely guarantee that if you put them into practice it will change your life from the same old “have to” into an “I HAVE to!”

OK, let's wrap this up... Take a look at this picture. You recognize this guy? His name is Wael Ghonim (WA-el Go-neem). He was recently recognized by Time Magazine as one of the worlds' most influential people in 2011. Why? Because there was something inside him that looked at the poverty, lack of good education and injustice in his country of Egypt and said, I HAVE to do something. As a techie who worked for Google, he began to use the gifts that he had - he spoke out through facebook and twitter. And it was his single voice that history now tells us catalyzed a revolution that ultimately brought freedom for him and millions of others in his country. It's an amazing story! His last tweet simply said, “Mission accomplished. Thanks to all the young brave Egyptians.” Was that something he had to do; like a to-do list? No! This was something he thought, “I HAVE to do!”

If one man can bring freedom to an entire country through using his facebook page for the mission, imagine if our whole church (everyone of you at everyone of our campuses) said, “It's not good enough for me to just know the mission, I have to be a part of the mission...I have to be on mission.” Every week



we have at least Number of Your Church Attendees people who show up at Name of Your Church; there are close to 300,000 people who call Covenant their church home. If you, every one of you will join me...not me, if you will join Jesus. We will catalyze a movement of love that will change the world!



Week 2 - B – BEGIN WITH PRAYER

Big Idea: To reach, restore, reproduce and release people into mission we begin by praying about who God wants us to bless each day and how He particularly wants us as individuals to bless our world.

We are continuing our series Discover Your Mission Now, and my hope for everyone of you is this: that you discover what it is that you “HAVE” to do! If you were with us last week we talked about how life is filled with so much stuff we “have” to do – you know the same old, same old. But we believe that when God birthed you, he birthed you with a dream and something that you and only you “HAVE” to do! A cause! A mission!

JOKE

I heard this week about a guy who discovered his mission – he decided his mission was to be a person of prayer, so he joins a monastery. At this monastery he commits to a life of prayer and silence and he’s only allowed to say just 2 words every 7 years.

- So he joins the monastery and seven years pass and the elders bring him in and ask him for his two words. **“Cold floors,”** he says. The elders nod and then send him away.
- Seven more years pass at the monastery. The elders bring him back in and ask for his two words. He clears his throats and says, **“Bad food.”** The elders nod and send him away.
- Seven more years pass. They bring him in for his two words. **“I quit,”** he says. The elders say, **“We’re not surprised, you’ve done nothing but complain ever since you got here.”**

REACH, RESTORE, REPRODUCE, RELEASE

As a Christ follower the beginning point for discovering your mission is understanding the mission of the one that we follow, Jesus. We said last week that the Jesus mission can be understood in 3 words:

- **Reach** – reaching people far from God. Anywhere from 70-90% of people in the Chicagoland area will not be in church this weekend and most are far from God. Jesus said to **“Go into all the world”** (Matthew 28:19) and we are accepting that challenge to “go” and be a people who will reach people who are far from God. *Pastors give statistics of the “unchurched” where you live*
- **Restore** – restore God’s dream for this world. As Christ-followers we can no longer just talk about poverty and shake our heads at issues of injustice, we must take action to address those issues. Jesus said, **“God has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.”** (Luke 4:18) This was a part of Jesus’ mission and it must be a part of our mission; to restore God’s dream for the world.
- **Reproduce** – reproduce the mission in others. Because Jesus vision was to see his mission spread from **“Jerusalem...Judea...Samaria... and to the ends of the earth”** (Acts 1:8) to fulfill



that vision we must not only do the mission but we must apprentice and **reproduce** the mission in others.

- **Release**—we release people into mission because Jesus’ calls his followers to be fishers of men and sends them out on his mission “As the Father sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21).

And when you put them all together that is the Jesus Mission; that is how you “help people find their way back to God.” Which is why it has always been and will always be our churches mission statement. But here is what needs to change: this is NOT just a mission statement to know! That is NOT just your churches mission statement. This is YOUR mission! Somewhere in here is your life mission; the reason God made you; your life’s purpose.

BLESSERS VS. CONVERTERS

Earlier this year I ran across an absolutely fascinating doctoral thesis. Now there is an oxymoron – “fascinating doctoral thesis!?!” But it was! It was titled: “Blessers versus Converters.” The study was based on two teams of missionaries that both went to Thailand. But they went to Thailand with two distinctly different missional strategies.

- The first team, “the converters” went with the sole intention of converting people or evangelizing everyone around them.
- The second team, “the blessers” went with the intention of “blessing” people. They would say, “I’m just here to bless whoever comes my way.” OR “I just want to be a blessing to the people in my community.”

The study followed them for a couple years and here is what they discovered:

- First of all, they discovered that that the “blessers” had a greater social impact than the “converters.” This proved out that the first teams’ intention of blessing the people and the community around them resulted in tremendous amounts of “social betterment and social good.”
- Secondly and here is what was so surprising - they discovered that the first team of “blessers” also had almost 50x as many conversions as the “converters!” The “blessers” helped 50 times more people find their way back to God!

Bottomline: The best way to accomplish the Jesus mission of reaching and restoring is to be a “blesser!”

BLESSING STRATEGY

And this should not be surprising to us. From the very beginning, way back in the first book of the Bible, Genesis God’s way to change the world has been through a blessing strategy. In Genesis, chapter 12, God says to Abraham: ***“I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.† I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will***



be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2,3). God blessed Abraham (relationally, financially and spiritually), but the point of that blessing was not for him to simply receive that blessing. The point of the blessing for Abraham and all who followed after him, including Jesus and us – we are being blessed to **BE** a blessing. (2x) We need to stop for a second. This is a subtle but important point – if you do not get this you will never discover your mission in life AND nothing else we say for the rest of this series will make any sense! Every good thing in your life; every blessing – you are blessed to **BE** a blessing to others!

And being a blessing to people is both how you accomplish the Jesus mission and how you discover your mission. Got it? If that is true, then tell me, “What does it look like to bless people or be a ‘blesser’?” Great question!

B.L.E.S.S

And the answer to that question is 5 missional practices that we are going to share over the next five weeks. They make up the acronym BLESS...B-L-E-S-S. Now before I share the first one with you – let me just say that for some of you there will be a temptation to try to just get them all done and check off the list so you can say, “Done. Did it. I’m good!” You do not bless people like that...

That is not how it works! If you are just trying to get them done so you can say you checked them off, it’s about you and not being a blessing to others.

Now, the other temptation is to dismiss these 5 missional practices because they seem too simple. Please don’t do make that foolish mistake! For the last 2 years the Covenant and particularly Make an Deepen Disciples have been on a search for what we are going to teach over the next five weeks. Discovering this in the scripture was not difficult. That came relatively quickly. The harder part was how to communicate it in a concise, easy to understand and memorable manner. They talked with church leaders within and without the ECC as close as Chicagoland and as far away as Seattle. And we took all that we learned and landed on five simple practices that make the acronym: B.L.E.S.S.

B – BEGIN WITH PRAYER

And the first missional practice is B – Begin With Prayer. And I know, you are thinking, “Seriously, you spent two years working on this and the best you can come up with is “B – Begin With Prayer.” ☺ This one was a stretch, but we knew prayer was the starting point so just work with me! ☺ They get better.

DEAN & DIVINE APPOINTMENTS



Let me start by telling you about how a guy that does this. He doesn't go to our church, he lives in another state, his name is Dean and he works with college students at Michigan State. And every morning Dean prays for what he calls “divine appointments”; that he would meet and talk to people that day that God wants Him to bless. And then he just goes through his day assuming that whoever he talks to might be a divine appointment.

Over the years, this has become a daily missional practice - to begin each day by praying for interactions and conversations with people that God can use to bless the world around him. I remember one story he told me where he had a cancelled appointment and instead of just doing e-mail or getting on facebook he decided to pray and asked, “God, how do you want me to use this time?” He sat still and the name of a student, Janice came to him and he sensed he was supposed to explain to her how she could find her way back to God in Jesus.

Janice had never been to church, was not a Christ follower but had been to one of their small groups. So he called and asked to connect over coffee. She said, “sure.”

- When they met he just told her, “Janice, I was praying and your name came to mind and I felt like I was supposed to share with you how you can become a follower of Jesus.”
- And she just starts crying.
- Dean immediately recoiled and said, “Oh, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have just blurted that out... I'm not being very sensitive.”
- Then Janice interrupted, “No. That's not it. I just can't believe that you are here. Last night I went to a Bible study in my dorm. They got to talking about what it means to be a Christian and I couldn't stop thinking about it. All night I couldn't sleep. I didn't know what to do. So I prayed this morning, asking God that He would bring someone to me today to tell me how to become a Christian.” She smiled and said, “And here you are. I just can't believe it!”

And I love talking to this guy because every single day of his life is a mini-adventure. I'm not kidding. He has his troubles and worries like everybody else, but no day is same-old, same-old for Dean. Every day he is seeking how God can use him to bless the world, and he begins with prayer. I want you to take note of this: prayer for Dean is both how you do the mission, but also how you discover the mission!

JESUS BEGINS WITH PRAYER

You know why Dean does this? Because Jesus did this! This was not only how Jesus began his day; this is how Jesus began his ministry -- with prayer. In Luke 4 it says, ***“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.”*** Jesus went off



into the wilderness to fast and pray and confront the evil one – prayer was how he began his mission on earth.

And two chapters later when Jesus gets ready to select those who will join him on this mission, look what Luke 6 says he does, ¹² ***One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*** ¹³ ***When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also designated apostles:*** ¹⁴ ***Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew,*** ¹⁵ ***Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot,*** ¹⁶ ***Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.*** (Luke 6:12-16)

Now, if that had been me I might have been tempted to skip the prayer part and just pick a few of the more outstanding leaders. You think there weren't a few obvious first round draft picks? Of course there were! But Jesus' doesn't just do what makes sense to Him; He spends the night in prayer before selecting the 12. The stakes were high. The 12 would be the first ones He would send out to bless the world on His mission.

You see, it had always been God's dream to bless the world through His people, and originally, His people were the twelve tribes of ancient Israel. But along the way, they kept focusing on *themselves* and *their* needs and *their* status as God's chosen people. They didn't get the mission – it wasn't just for them to be blessed, but to be a blessing!

But God doesn't give up on His dream of reaching and restoring the world. And with the selection of the 12 apostles, Jesus is renewing God's mission to the world by picking twelve new missional representatives. Many scholars will tell you that these 12 people (who are all members of the original twelve tribes) are kind of like the replacements for the twelve tribes. God is starting over, renewing His plan for the 12 tribes through these 12 apostles.

Now, some of you might be ahead of me and wondering, “Why did Jesus need to pray if He's God?” Good question! See, even though Jesus was God in the flesh, to become a human being meant taking on self-imposed limitations. The Bible says He knows what it's like to be us, to be in our shoes; and so He became a lot more like us than most of us have ever imagined. Even as God in the flesh, He depended on God the Father and looked to Him for direction.

Now, we don't know what happened that night and early morning He began with prayer.

- Did God speak to Him in an audible voice and start naming names?
- Did certain names just pop into His head or was there some sort of sign?



We don't know. We just know that before Jesus began His mission to bless the world, He began with prayer.

And its interesting to note that the guys Jesus picked after praying weren't the obvious choices for a starting lineup. They were...

- ...common fishermen.
- ...corrupt tax collectors.
- ...some violent political revolutionaries.
- ...and a lot of them were just nobody's. People that anyone else would have just walked right on by.

But Jesus began with prayer.

And what Dean learned from Jesus is what I am learning for him too – prayer is both how you do the mission and how you discover your mission!

DAVE & PRAYER

A pastor named Dave Ferguson who first came up with the BLESS missional practices shares this story of how God “awakened” him to the key to evangelism—beginning with prayer for those far from God. Dave writes...

A few weeks ago I was out walking my dog Cody with Sue. Did you know I had a dog? I don't think I've ever mentioned my dog before? Family secret!?!

- We have “shared custody” of our dog. Us and a friend, Dale take turns with Cody.
- It started when he would go visit Dale's, he would give him steak to eat, let Cody sleep with him, and just totally spoil him. So when Cody would come home to our house and not get steak, and not get to sleep with me...he was depressed! Seriously, he would come in our house and just go straight to his bed and just sit there like, “This place sucks!”
- So now we have shared custody. It's weird.

But I'm out walking the dog with Sue and our neighbor comes out. I've started doing this missional practice of beginning each day with prayer since last fall. I've specifically prayed for my neighbors, another guy I know through the kids' school and like my friend Dean, asking for divine appointments. Now we have lived in the same neighborhood for the last 8-9 years and I confess, I've made very little difference in my current neighborhood.



Now one of our neighbors recently was very ill and went through a tough physical battle that lasted most of a year. Very tough! Now, I'm out walking and the dog and my neighbor meets me and out of the blue we have this conversation:

- **Neighbor:** *“Hey Dave, I remember Sue saying you were going to write a book about ‘finding your way back to God’...ever write that book?”*
- **Dave:** *“No...not yet. I’d like to...why?”*
- **Neighbor:** *‘I just kind of feel like that is what I need.’*
(Quiet/emotional) Then she says to me, *“I’m afraid of dying.”*
- **Dave:** *“You know, Sue and I were just talking about how we need to have you guys over for dinner.”*
- **Neighbor:** *“We’d love that...it would be great to sit down and talk...that would be great!”*

I don't know exactly what or how - but something changed when I started praying!

Now, I want you to hold onto that story for a couple reasons. One, I think God is at work in that story and I can't wait to see what happens. Two, because what is emerging for me personally is a missional story. Like we said last week – our #1 goal for this year as a church is this: for every one of you to have a missional story to tell. That you and I will have a story in 2017 of how God used you in His mission to bless and change the world!

LOUIE WEBER AND PRAYER IN THE MALL

Now I got to warn you - this prayer thing will be exciting, adventuresome and kind of dangerous. Because if you start praying and following through on God's leadings; some crazy stuff will start happening. My favorite story along these lines comes from this guy I know named Louie.

- One day Louie went to the mall and for whatever reason he noticed this guy sitting on a bench and he had this strange sensation: “Go tell that guy God loves him.” And Louie doesn't want to do that, would you? Walk up to a complete and total stranger and say, “Hey, God loves you.” So he does what most of us might do, he shrugs it off.
- Comes out of a store in another part of the mall a bit later and there's that same guy again, just sitting there on a different bench this time, and again, Louie is getting that inner nudge, “Go over there and tell that guy God loves him.” He blows it off again.
- Then a third time he sees the same guy. So he finally says, “Alright!” He walks up to the guy and says, “I don't want to seem weird or anything, but I feel like I'm supposed to tell you that God loves you.” And the guy's eyes filled up with tears and he said, “This morning I was at the end of my rope. I told God, ‘If you're real, show me You love me today’. And you're the third complete



stranger in the mall today who's come up to me and said those words to me. No one's ever said it to me once before, and now it's happened 3 times in one day."

CONCLUSION & CHALLENGE

Ok, let m wrap this up with a challenge. Ready? Over the next 5 weeks we are going to lay out these 5 missional challenges - B.L.E.S.S. And the challenge is this:

- **Daily:** Do one of these every day. And since the only one you know so far is B – Begin with prayer. I want you to start everyday till we gather back here by praying, “God use to bless your world. Make me apart of your mission. Make your mission clear to me. God use me to bless someone today.”
- **Weekly:** When you gather in your small group start your small group by asking, “Who did you bless this week?”

OK? That is challenge. Everyday we pray, “God use me to bless someone today.” And every week at small group ask each other, “Who did you bless this week?”

And let's start right now. How? By beginning with prayer. I will pray out loud and you can pray silently.

Guided Prayer Time



Week 3 – L – Listen

Big Idea: To bless people on the Jesus Mission, we will listen to people’s needs and stories more than we talk.

Series Recap

OK, ok, here I am. We *are* going to talk about “listening” today, but not just “listening” in general. “Discover Your Mission Now” is about each of us becoming part of the Jesus Mission to reach people who don’t know the grace of God in Jesus and restoring the world to more like it was meant to be, a place without hunger and poverty and loneliness and hopelessness and addiction. And we want to get as many people as possible to join in the Jesus Mission of reaching and restoring, and more and more people joining the Mission is what we like to call reproducing. Reproducing that mission in the lives of other people so they’re on this Mission too and we want to see ourselves as sent people, released into the Jesus mission

And we’re learning to live out 5 missional practices, 5 practical ways to go about the Jesus Mission based on the acronym “B.L.E.S.S.” We’re called by God to be not just receivers of His blessing but to be dispensers of His blessing to the whole world. (*Genesis 12:2-3: “I will bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*) Last week we talked about what the “B” in Bless stands for. Anybody remember? The Be is for “Begin with Prayer”. The first missional practice is to begin each day with a prayer that asks God “How do you want me to bless the world today?” and then keep that prayer on your mind as you interact with people where you live and work: co-workers, students in your school, neighbors, the barista at the coffee shop. We want God’s direction on how we go about blessing the world. B stands for “Begin with Prayer”

That’s the B, so now let’s talk about the L. And no, I’m not talking about the train in downtown Chicago. The “L” stands for.... “Listen.” To bless the world, to bless the people God brings our way, we need get good at listening.

Jesus and the Blind Man

Here’s a story of what listening looked like in the life of Jesus. (*PPT-Luke 18:35-40*) “When Jesus was coming close to Jericho, a blind man sat begging beside the road. The man heard the crowd walking by and asked what was happening. Some people told him that Jesus from Nazareth was passing by. So the blind man shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!” The people who were going along with Jesus told the man to be quiet. But he shouted even louder, “Son of David, have pity on me!” Jesus stopped and told some people to bring the blind man over to him.”



Now, let's pause for just a second in our story so we don't miss something. Jesus wasn't looking for someone to heal that day. He was on His way to the city of Jericho, which was one of the last stops on the way to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover Feast. Now tons of people were on their way to Jerusalem on the same road as Jesus. So Jericho was Jericho was an extra-bustling place this time of year. Picture just hoards of people like at Taste of Chicago on the Fourth of July. (Or insert your own location or nearby city and event that hosts large numbers of people.) Totally packed. And amidst all these people, there's this blind guy, and though he couldn't see, he apparently heard that Jesus was passing his way. So the blind man cries out to Jesus, "Have mercy on me."

And despite the din of the crowd, Jesus hears this one guy. I picture Jesus being able to hear this guy's particular voice like a mother can hear HER child's cry in a room full of toddlers. He hears one man crying out to him as he's passing by along the road. And the people traveling with Jesus tell him to leave Jesus alone. But he won't, he cries out even louder. And here's what happens next.

(PPT-Luke 18:40-42) "Jesus asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see!" he answered. Jesus replied, "Look and you will see! Your eyes are healed because of your faith."

Now, you knew that was coming, right? Blind man can't see, calls out to Jesus, Jesus heals him. The end. But not so fast: what I want us all to notice is the question Jesus asks the blind man: "What do *you* want me to do for you?" Kinda seems like a silly question, doesn't it? It's not Jesus couldn't tell the blind guy was blind. So why does He ask what he wants the blind man to do for him? Is this like dramatic buildup for the ensuing miracle or what? Well, I'll tell you what I believe this story tells us about Jesus in addition to the fact that He could heal the blind. I believe it's showing us that Jesus was a person who didn't assume He knew what people needed. So He asked questions. He *listened*.

We all know listening is super important in our closest personal relationships, everybody here has probably said to someone or had it said to them "You never listen to me." But listening is also super important when it comes to living out the Jesus Mission. Jesus says, "What do *you* want me to do for you?", and though today isn't about going around asking people that question, we need to be listening for what people would say if we did ask them that. Truth is, too often I think we think people on mission for Jesus just go around doing nice, kind stuff for people whenever they can, and there's some truth to that. But before that, in most instances, what we need most to do is listen.

The Problem of Not Listening

We live in a world where hardly anybody really listens. Most people are most interested in what they have to say. There's a saying "The opposite of listening is not speaking, it's waiting to speak." Isn't that true? That even when we're not talking, a lot of times we're thinking about what the other person is



saying. We're thinking about what we're gonna say. I struggle with this. Too many times I'm not really listening closely to people. I'm just cueing up what I'm gonna say.

How many of you (**show of hands**) have ever been in a conversation where it felt like the other person was just not listening at all? Why did so many women raise their hand while glaring at their husbands? ☺ We have all been part of conversations where the other person was saying “uh-huh,” but we knew they were not really listening to anything that we were saying. But if we want to discover and embrace our mission, we have to become very intentional about listening. Listening is so crucial in the Jesus Mission.

Michael Frost is an author and church leader and a friend of the Covenant who has spoken at Midwinter and who has spent much of his career helping people discover their mission. He tells a story about this missionary group who went to India to serve the poor in a remote village. The group showed up with all sorts of supplies and programs, and skilled workers ready to transform that village to a place of health and vitality. And they went to the people living in what was really a slum, and said “We could build a medical clinic to help take care of the hurting and sick, we could build a school to provide education so the next generation can work their way out of poverty We could build a church so you could gather on the weekends and learn about God. So what do you want us to do for you?” Sounds a lot like the question that Jesus asked. And the people of the village said “We need a mailbox. (you know, like their own official zip code).” The missionaries said, “A mailbox? We can give you a school or a church building and all's you want your own mailbox? And the people said, “yes, What we really need most is a mailbox.” See in India, if you live in a slum you do not have a zip code or a mailbox which means that you do not exist on a map. Even if you are a community of 10 or 20 thousand people, if you don't have a zip code, you are not recognized as existing for anything, including social services from the government.. The people did not want a school, medical clinic, or church first. They wanted to be put on a map. They wanted to have an identity. They wanted to become a recognized part of their own country. The missionaries would not have known this unless they listened. And it was no small task. It took the missionaries two years to work through the bureaucracy to get this village registered; but once they did, the village began to be changed.

The guy who invented the stethoscope was noted for saying, “If you use this tool, don't stop listening to your patients, they are telling you how to heal them.” He didn't want doctors to just listen to hearts and lungs with his invention, he wanted to make sure doctors still listened to their patients. That's a magnificent principle, isn't it? We gotta listen to people, listen to our community. Listen to our workplaces. Listen to our families. Listen to our classmates. Listen to the hurts, the needs, the wounds of those what God has placed in our lives. We must listen for what they really need.



Listen to People

Now when I say, listen to people, I'm not just talking about listening to the words that come out of their mouth. I mean listening for where people are really at in their lives. It's kind of like in real estate. We've all heard the saying that the three most important things about a piece of property are LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. That's not just true of real estate, it's true of people. Dr John Gottman is the leading researcher on why marriages succeed and fail. One of the things that Gottman has discovered is that unhappily married couples THINK they know what their spouse is most looking forward to and excited about and what they are most worried/concerned about, (which is what I meant by a person's "location") but they actually don't. And happily married couples do know those things. In a manner of speaking, happily married couples know their spouse's emotional/personal location. And happily married people don't have some intuitive sixth sense about their spouses. They listen to each other. They pay close attention to each other's lives. In fact for some of us, this is something we need to start asking on a regular basis. I do it with my kids: "So what are you most excited about these days and what are you most concerned about?" Many times my youngest will mention the name of the latest, hottest video game that's about to be released as the answer to both what he's most looking forward to and worried about: He's excited that it's about to be released and he's worried he won't get one of the first copies or that it won't be all that cracked up to be. But the point here is that to really know someone, you need to know on a regular basis what they are most excited about and most concerned about. I urge anybody who is in any important relationship to start asking the other person about their location.

When it comes to discovering our mission in our neighborhoods, in our work places, in our families, and in our schools; we must listen for the location of people. We can't just assume that we know what to do for people we come into contact with. We need to know their "location": What makes them excited? What matters most to them? What challenges are they facing? What needs do they have?

There's a story that's told from the very early years of Christianity about this monk who lived all alone out in the desert, praying and meditating and studying the Scriptures, and a couple of times a year he would come into town for supplies. And people would line up outside the hut he would be staying in by the hundreds just to get a chance to have their turn to talk to him. One man was really curious about what someone would have to say that was so profound that you'd stand in line for hours and sometimes days just to get in and talk with him, so he got in line. He waited for hours and hours, and when it was his turn, he went in and sat down and what he discovered was that the man didn't have profound things to say. He would just sit there and listen. He just listened. People in our world want desperately to be heard. The question is: Are we listening?

Listen to Places



We cannot bless the world without listening to people, but we need to also be listening to places. Here's what I mean by that. If we want to listen to our community, or our city, I would encourage you and your small group to adopt a very simple missional practice. Grab a local newspaper and a highlighter and read it front to back. And as you do, highlight every need that you run across in that paper. Once you highlight every need, simply allow that to drive a conversation in the group. Of these needs, which one(s) can we meet? Which one(s) are we particularly interested in or passionate about? By reading the paper, we may discover an organization that needs volunteers. We may learn about a local event that we can plug into. We may learn about a person or group of people that really need help. If we simply listen to our community, I believe it will tell us what it needs.

A pastor who has just recently started a church plant in the city of Chicago, one of the ways she listens to the area she lives in is just show up at things happening in her community: at a neighborhood block club meetings she's listened and learned that there is a need to do a better job caring for the seniors in their community. It's made her start dreaming about building volunteer teams to do senior wellness checks during severe weather. At Chamber of Commerce meetings she learned that the businesses that sponsor and participate in the festivals in their neighborhood have a hard time finding volunteers to help with the festivals. Maybe her church could supply the volunteers? At forums hosted by the city alderman she learned that the #1 reason families move out of her neighborhood is the quality (or lack thereof) of the high schools. And she got thinking about how God could use her church to come alongside these schools and make them better.

The places we live and work are constantly speaking...we'll hear them, if we just listen. Whether it's a neighborhood association, the school board, chamber of commerce, city council...show up to a meeting and just listen for what God would have you hear there.

Listen Daily

To BLESS the world, first the B: we begin with prayer. And next the L: listen to the people and the places where we live and work. Let's pray for that daily. "How do you want me to bless the world for you today? Help me to listen." And then listen each day. And when we get together in our small groups, let's talk about what we're hearing and what our listening to people and places is telling us. And remember: this is not about us listening so we can go do some good deeds and nice things for people. This is about BLESSING the world. This is about the Jesus Mission: About how to reach and restore people and communities, and have this mission reproduced in the lives of others. Jesus heard that one man's voice in a huge crowd of people, and everyday, each of us come into contact with people who nobody cares about and nobody listens to. May we truly be transformed into people who have the heart of Jesus and be people through whom God changes lives and changes the world. People who are always listening for the answer to Jesus' question, "What do you want Me to do for you?"





Week 4 – E – Eat

Big Idea: We will bless our world by sharing meals with people in need of being reached and restored.

Intro: Competitive Eating

Hungry yet? We're talking about eating today, and most people I know like to eat, but some people actually eat for a living. And they eat a lot. How many've heard of competitive eating? Yeah it's considered by many to be a real sport. And it's real gross. Every 4th of July, ESPN shows the National Hot Dog Eating Championship at Coney Island. Anybody know the name of the reigning champion? Yup, Joey Chestnut. He's won the last four years in a row, ousting the previous champ, Kobayashi. Chestnut holds the world record for hot dog eating: 68 hot dogs (including the buns) in 10 minutes. That's over 21,000 calories in 10 minutes. Have you seen it? It's disgusting. But gross as it is, it's big business. There's the National Eating Association and The International Federation of Eating. There's significant prize money and even endorsement contracts for the winners, presumably for products like Tums and Pepto Bismol.

Series recap

But we're not talking about competitive eating today. We are talking about another particular kind of eating. We're in a series called Discover Your Mission Now. We're talking about how as each of us tries to figure out our particular mission in life, one thing we can know for sure is that as Christ followers, we all have one mission in common, and around here we call it the Jesus Mission: reaching people who don't yet know the grace of God in Jesus, helping to restore the world so it will be more like God made it to be, and including as many other people as we can in the Jesus Mission, which we call reproducing. So the Jesus Mission = reach, restore, reproduce and release into mission.

And we've taken the key missional practices we see in the life of Jesus and turned them into an acronym: BLESS. And the word "bless" is not some generic religious word, like "God bless you". It comes from God's original call to His people, that they are meant to not just be *recipients* of God's blessing, but to be *dispensers* of God's blessing to the world. And each letter in BLESS stands for a different way to go about blessing the world every day. The B is forbegin with prayer, asking God at the beginning of each day, 'How do you want me to bless the world for You today?' The L is forlisten, listen to the people and places we live and work so we can hear their needs instead of just assuming we know what they need. And today's service is sponsored by the letter "E", which I'm sure you've guessed by now stands for... "Eat."

Jesus the missional eater



Ever heard a message on eating? EAT!! So think with me: If I asked you to think about the things Jesus did during His time on earth, what would come to mind? I'm guessing most of us would think of things like teaching, healing and doing miracles, praying, walking on water, dying on the cross, right? But did you ever think that part of how Jesus saved the world was by... eating?

Here's one of my favorite stories of Jesus eating with people. It comes from the Gospel of Matthew, and it's actually about Matthew Himself:

“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. “Follow me,” He told him, and Matthew got up and followed Him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “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.” -Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus is walking along and He sees a tax collector named Matthew at his tax collector's booth, which was kind of like his office. And Jesus walks up to Matthew and says those 2 life-changing words: “Follow Me.”

And as we've talked about before, in Jesus' day, tax collectors were considered the scum of the earth. You know the jokes people tell about lawyers? Like how the good news is that a busload of lawyers drove the side of a cliff and the bad news is the bus had one empty seat? Well, tax collectors were the butt of those kind of jokes in Jesus' day. Tax collectors were local lackies for the Roman Empire, so right out of the gate they're considered traitors. Plus to get their salary, they had to gouge people for as much money as they could through whatever means they could, so they were corrupt. Tax collectors in Jesus' day made Rod Blagojevich look like Mr. Rogers. So that Jesus calls one of the most despised, looked down upon people in to be one of his disciples, that was a shocker.

And notice the first thing Jesus did after Matthew said “yes” to “follow Me”. He didn't have him take a class on how to be a disciple. He didn't get Matthew started studying the bible and memorizing Scripture. He went to Matthews house to eat.

And look who else Jesus eats with? Even more tax collectors, along with a whole group of people referred to as “sinners”. Quick side note— “sinners” here *doesn't* mean that some people are sinners and others aren't. The term “sinner” in Jesus' day was a catch-all derogatory term for anybody who wasn't religious, or who was involved in an illicit lifestyle, like prostitution. So here's Jesus, the esteemed rabbi, eating with the most despised and looked-down-on people, a veritable who's who of the socially unacceptable. And to the leaders of the religious establishment, this was scandalous.



See, Eating in those days was central to life. I'm not sure as people who scarf down fast food while driving down the road and say "yeah, I ate", I don't know if we are capable of really grasping how central eating was to life back then. And I don't mean in just a physical sustenance way. Eating with someone was a statement that you wanted to be associated with them. Eating with someone was an affirmation of that person's value and worth. Who you ate with was a statement of who you loved and cared about and considered part of your social class. So Jesus communicated a LOT by the seemingly mundane act of eating at Matthew's house with him and his socially outcast friends.

So of course the Pharisees, the religious elite, are super offended by Jesus eating at Matthew's house, so they ask His disciples (trying to undermine Jesus behind his back) "why is Jesus doing this?" But Jesus overhears and He says, I kind of picture him saying this with a chicken leg in his hand, "It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."

Now Jesus' is NOT saying the Pharisees were healthy, good people who didn't need a doctor and the people He's eating are messed-up. Jesus was saying that He was on mission with his life, and they (the Pharisees) didn't get it. And when He says "Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice", He was quoting the Old Testament, which the Pharisees were famous for knowing forwards and backwards. So Jesus is saying, "You know God says 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice', but you don't *really* know what it *means*, or if you do, you don't live it out." These were words God had spoken to His people who'd become meticulous about performing religious rituals while at the same time neglecting the poor and the vulnerable and the marginalized. So Jesus *isn't* saying the Pharisees are "the righteous" who don't need a doctor. He's saying "You guys need to live out all that stuff that you're so well-known for having memorized."

And one other thing: this dust-up between Jesus and the Pharisees over who Jesus ate with is not an isolated incident. Here's another thing Jesus said to His critics among the religious establishment from another place in the Bible. "The Son of Man (that's Jesus' favorite way of referring to Himself) came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." But wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it' (Luke 7:34-35) Jesus wasn't a drunk, He wasn't a glutton, but He was so frequently eating with people who were that He got accused of it.

What we gotta see in Jesus' life is that eating was not just something he did because people gotta eat. Eating was integral to His mission of reaching and restoring the world. Jesus was a missional eater.

Missional Eating and us



And for us, to live out the Jesus Mission by blessing the world, E stands for eat, and it's all about forming relationships with people where we live and work that go beyond small talk and occasional conversation to eating with people. Here's my most favorite quote on this from a couple of guys who wrote a book called *Right Here Right Now*. Quote, “Sharing meals together on a regular basis is one of the most sacred practices we can engage in as believers. Missional hospitality is a tremendous opportunity to extend the kingdom of God. We can literally eat our way into the kingdom of God! If every Christian household regularly invited a stranger or a poor person into their home for a meal once a week, we would literally change the world by eating!”

Change the world by eating. Gotta love that! And I think they're right. Imagine what might happen if every Christ-follower at COMMUNITY, all 6,000 or 7,000 or however many of us there are from all our campuses, if we all started regularly and eating with our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends who don't know Jesus? If we are gonna BLESS the world, we got eat with the world.

Eating with people is absolutely essential to BLESSING the world. God's designed us in such a way that eating is not just a biological necessity, it's also a social, relational thing. And eating is a great way to bless the world.

Obstacles to Missional Eating

Now I know you hear this and maybe you're thinking “Well that sounds all well and good, preacher boy, but it's not that simple.” We all have our “buts” about eating with others on a regular basis.

Like “But I don't have time...” Many of us can barely find time to eat meals with our *own* families, right? I don't wanna know how many meals I eat in the car driving down the road per week. I do get it—finding time to eat with people can seem like a practical impossibility. But what if maybe, just maybe, this call of Jesus to missional eating is the thing that finally gets us to a tipping point where we realize we gotta start managing our time differently, because we can't BLESS the world like God wants us to if we don't. Missional eating doesn't have to be just one more thing to cram into our already slammed schedules—it can actually become a part of the regular healthy rhythms of our lives. We just gotta be willing to shift our live to include those regular rhythms, like slowing down enough to eat.

Another big “but”: “But I wouldn't know what to say” or “I don't want to make anybody uncomfortable (especially me)”. I get that. I realize that depending on how you're personally wired up, being social and talking over a meal with somebody you may not already know all that well seems pretty daunting. But I believe personality and temperament don't have to call the shots here. God has called us ALL to BLESS the world, and He will give us all the ability to do that, and part of how we BLESS the world



is by going beyond the surface relationships with people, and a big part of how we do that is by eating with them. E is for Eat.

Now I realize there's all sorts of other potential “buts” about this missional eating thing: “But I don't like to have people in my home”

“But I can't cook” “But I don't have time to clean up so the place is fit for guests or to fix something fancy enough for guests.”

So let me respond, re-but real quickly: “But I don't like having people in my home?” Then eat out. “But I can't cook?” Then carry in. “But I don't want to have to do the cleanup after or have to fix a nice meal.” Make your husband do it! ☺ Become a missional eater!!!

Note to Pastors: You may wish to use this illustration from Pastor Dave Ferguson who with Alan Hirsch created the 5 BLESS Missional Practices or share one of your own on listening to people far from God:

Some months ago I started seeing this old guy who looked like he was from India coming into the cybercafé lounge area out here just about every day and reading all these Christian books that are out there. And some time ago I felt this spiritual nudge to introduce myself and talk to the guy. So I did. I didn't say I was a pastor, I just told him my name and asked him his, and he said it was Shiva and he's here visiting his son. So we've had a few conversations about what he's been reading, and how he's Hindu, and we went from conversations about books to sitting down in the café to talk over a diet Coke, and then just this past week I bumped into him at the counter of the café, and he asked me what I was getting, and I told him a bagel and cream cheese, and he pulls out his money and says “let me buy it and then we sit down together. I'm going back to India tomorrow to stay.” So we sat down, me with my bagel and cream cheese and he just ordered a diet coke for himself, and we talked about all sorts of stuff about his life back in India, and I'm telling you: this conversation that happened over something as basic as a bagel and cream cheese, it just felt different than the other times we've talked. And when we got done he said “May I give you something to remember me by?” And I said “sure” and he said “I'll be back in 10 minutes” and sure enough ten minutes later he comes walking in and gives me this, and he says “put this on your desk and remember me, remember Shiva.” Eating with someone does something that nothing else does.

I know there are tons of reasons that can make this difficult and uncomfortable. But I believe it's totally worth pushing *through* our excuses, getting *out* of our comfort zones, and so we can discover our mission for our lives by allowing God to bless others through eating.



Please, don't forget what's at stake here--blessing the world. Helping accomplish God's ultimate mission for our world. For some of you as you take on the challenge of this missional practice of eating, you'll discover that hospitality is a spiritual gift you didn't even know you *had*, and you'll be able to touch more and more lives by having folks in your home at your table. You're gone find yourself helping others eat their way into the kingdom of God.

And here's the real question—if you knew the *only thing* standing between a co-worker of yours and eternal life was you *eating* with them just once, would you do it? What if the only thing standing between your neighbor and a saving relationship with Christ was you having them over for dinner? If that were true, would you do it? I *know* you would. I have no idea if sitting down over a bagel and cream cheese with Shiva will make any difference, but I'm not gonna lie to you: it feels great to know that somehow someday it might.

And no, this is not having some kind of Messiah complex. It's about having the Messiah's Mission. He has given you and me the mission of BLESSING our world—will we rise to His call on our lives?

And remember—you don't have to do this alone. We encourage everybody to get in a small group because we were never meant to pursue this mission solo. What if your Small Group started having BBQ's or parties or dinners once a month and just inviting neighbors, co-workers, and friends? No Bible study, just hanging out, eating and talking? That could be someone's first taste of your group, of this church, of God! And if you're not in a Small Group yet, why don't you make this year the year you finally get into one? You'll find that every missional practice of BLESSing the world will be easier, more fun, and more impactful when you don't go it alone.

But I know how it is. Things can sound pretty good and maybe even a little inspiring when we hear it in a message, but then we go out and the next day forget all about it. God forbid that we do that with His call on our lives to touch the lives of others through blessing the world. Through prayer, through listening, through eating. If even half of us as a community started doing these missional practices on a regular basis, where we live and work would become different. People will find their way back to God. Broken and lost parts of the life God intended human beings to have will be restored. May you and may I take God's word to us today and let it take root in our souls. Let's eat our way into the kingdom.



Week 5 – Serve

Big Idea: To bless people on the Jesus Mission, we will serve individuals and communities at their point of need that are identified as we listen.

Introduction

Welcome. We're in one of the most important series in the life of our church, called “**Discover Your Mission Now.**” So, let's jump right in! To discover your mission; the first thing we have to understand is that our God is a missional God; a God with a mission. He has always had a mission. His mission? To help all people find their way back to Him. That is **why** the Father sent the Son...and **why** the Son sent the Spirit...and **why** the Spirit of God is sending us. To accomplish the mission of helping people find their way back to Him! That is His mission. And that is our mission! And God has a particular strategy to accomplish His mission: it's called a **blessing strategy**. And the blessing strategy is both how you accomplish the Jesus mission and how you discover your own mission. Got it?

And this blessing strategy is put into practice through the acronym B.L.E.S.S. Each letter stands for one of 5 core missional practices. We're asking everyone to do one of these each day and start your small group with the question: “Who did you B.L.E.S.S. this week?” Since I want this to sink in deep, let's review what each of the letters stands for:

- **B?** Begin with prayer. Asking God each day “How do you want me to bless the world today?”
- **L?** Listen with care. This means listening to the people and places God sends you to; listen for what people are going through and needing.
- **E?** E is for Eat together! Share meals and hospitality and create strong relational connections with others.

And today's letter is **S** and it stands for Serve in love. I want to spend our entire time today on the 4th missional practice in B.L.E.S.S which is **S - serve**.

Note to Pastors: You may wish to share this personal illustration from Dave Ferguson, the creator of the BLESS missional practices or share a similar story of how God is growing you in being a blessing of those who don't know Jesus:

As we were planning this series last Fall I started integrating these missional practices into my own life. I think it is important that I lead from the front; you know speed of the leader, speed of the team. And so I begin each day with prayer. Specifically, I started **praying** for my neighbors. As Sue and I have been praying for them, we have noticed that we are much more intentional about relationship building with them - you know, the **listening** and **eating** together. We had them over to our house for Halloween



– we passed out treats together in my driveway and ate some of Sue’s chili in front of a fire pit. Good time getting to know each other. We’ve gone to Starbucks together and talked about some poignant spiritual topics. We had them over for dessert at Christmas time.

And through listening and eating together we are looking for ways to **serve** them. So, two weeks ago when it snowed I was out shoveling when my other neighbor came over and loaned me his snow blower – don’t you love it when that happens! So I not only snow blowed my sidewalk and driveway but also my other neighbors I was praying for. I started getting this weird question in my head – if I snow blowed my neighbors sidewalk using my other neighbors snow blower, does that still count? Do I still get the credit for serving? Crazy! If we are not careful, there can be a lot of mixed motives for serving: trying to gain a reputation for yourself; trying to make sure you don’t owe anyone or so that others do own you.

That is definitely **not** what we mean when we talk about **S - Serving**.

Now everybody knows that Jesus served people. He is our example. Mark 10:45 says, “**The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” But the best way to understand serving is to see how Jesus did it. Let’s take a look at one example in the book of Mark.

Healing of the Deaf Man

“Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After He took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears. Then He spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (eh FAHF thah - which means “Be opened!”). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement.” (Mark 7:31-36).

As we unpack this story we will discover a few key words that describe how Jesus served people:

Proximity

The first word is **proximity**. Notice in scripture who Jesus served – verse 32 says, “**There some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.**” The people that Jesus served were always the people right in front of him, near him, those in close proximity. Something I have noticed already during our Discover Your Mission Now series



is that as people search for their mission – many of us want something big, bold and grand! It's like we are looking for something we can write book about. And when I suggest, “What about your neighbor?” I can see it in your eyes, you are thinking, “Nobody ever got a Nobel Peace Prize for just loving their neighbor.” But that is where you start – you start with the people near you, in front of you, in close proximity. Where you work; where you play; where you hang-out; in your neighborhood. Those are the people you serve!

Now there are some exceptions. If you back up to the beginning of verse 31 it says, “***Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.***” Our missional God sent Jesus from Tyre all the way to the region of the Decapolis. Why? So Jesus could be in close proximity to the people God wanted him to serve. In the same way, some of you are not in the place that God means for you to be. If you are honest, the only reason you are where you are is because the company you work for sent you there...not God. You only live where you live right now because it was better or bigger house or apartment than the last one...that was not God. You are where you are because of real estate values or because it's a better school system, or you got a promotion - all good things...but God did not send you there. And for some of you, in order to discover your mission God is going to relocate you so he can put you into closer proximity to the place and people he wants you to bless. He is going to send some of you to another city to plant a church – LA, Seattle or Philly. Some of you he is going to send to a different country – Haiti or the Philippines. Some of you are going to get a spiritual transfer locally to under-resourced communities in Chicago or to East Aurora or maybe East Joliet.

Please hear what I'm about to say next. God has either **sent** you to the people you are to serve OR he is going to **send** you to the people you are to serve. **Almost** without exception, the people we are to meant to serve will be in close proximity. Right around you! Who is that? Take a moment and let God bring someone to mind. Got it?

Perceptively

Second, notice that it says (vs. 33) Jesus “***took him aside.***” Jesus took this man away from the attention of the crowd. Now generally when somebody takes you aside, it's not a good thing, right?

- As a kid, I can remember my parents taking me aside and getting the “I brought you into the world and I can take you out.” That was not good!
- Or sometimes Name Your Spouse will take me aside and this is the look (shaking my head). That is not good!

But Jesus takes this guy aside. Why? To serve him. Why would He do that? He'd healed lots of people publically before, so why does Jesus take this particular guy aside?



Well, the Bible says this guy was deaf and has a severe speech impediment. So, more than likely he knows what it is like to be made of fun of, to be made a spectacle of. Just imagine how he was probably mocked, made fun of, and laughed at much of his life. Kids can be very cruel and adults sometimes are not much better. Every time this man tried to speak in fractured garbled words it drew attention to his disability. And this is one of my favorite things about this story. Jesus realizes this and refuses to make a spectacle of his condition. So he **“took him aside”** away from the crowd. Jesus is serving this guy in a way that shows that He understands what he needs beyond the obvious. He serves him **perceptively**.

Stephen Covey in his best-seller 7-Habits of Highly Effective People tells the story of being on a New York subway quietly reading a book, when he was interrupted by two wild little boys that got on with their father at a subway stop. The children weren't just loud, but way out of control, jumping up and down, running loudly through the subway car. And the father seemed not to notice or really care that his children were misbehaving and disturbing all the other commuters. Finally Stephen couldn't take it any more and he approached the father and explained that he really needed to control his children and teach them some respect. The father agreed, and sighed sullenly, saying, “Yeah, I just don't know what to do; and I really don't know what to say to them. We just came from the hospital where their mother died.” Covey would use that story to remind us we need to “seek first to understand.” The people God has put in close proximity: where you work; where you play; where you hangout; in your neighborhood - don't assume you know their story or their pain. Serve perceptively.

Personally

OK, that feeling you had at the end of that story - when you found out that the mother had died. Did you feel it? Something inside you went, “Ohhhh.” It hurt, didn't it? Well that is exactly what happens with Jesus in our story. Jesus goes beyond just perceiving this man's pain; he actually enters into the man's pain and feels it personally. See where it says Jesus **“looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!”** (eh FAHF thah) In the original language this was not a sigh like we think of a sigh. It was a deep personal sort of groan. You know, like when you get some really bad news about someone close to you and without even thinking you just go “Ohhhhhh”. Jesus is feeling for what this guy's been through. See, Jesus was not just some serving machine who was cranking out acts of kindness wherever He went. He was deeply affected by the suffering of the people he was serving. As He served He courageously entered into the pain of the people He was blessing. I heard author and missional Christian thought leader Alan Hirsch who really gets this, explain, “Whoever we're called to serve we need to feel their pain.” Serving others is going to get personal. It needs to.

Powerfully



Got it? Served in close proximity, served perceptively, served personally and finally, he served powerfully. Don't just run past the big event of this story. It says, ***“Jesus looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (eh FAHF thah) (which means “Be opened!”). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.”*** Something I want us to learn from this story. In serving, Jesus used and accessed God's power...and we should too! Here is my assessment of us as a church right now – we are all fired up and motivated to discover our mission and serve the people around us. Love that! And when we think serve, we think of doing good things: anything from shoveling a driveway to adopting a kid. And that is big and that is what we should do. But we should never forget that in our serving we have available to us the power of God. And you might be thinking, “But that was Jesus, of course he do miracles; but not me.” Really? Did you know that in John 14:12 Jesus told his followers, ***“I tell you the truth, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these...”*** I say all this to remind you that when you are serving people:

- If they are sick, pray and ask God to heal them.
- If they have an addiction, ask God to free them.
- If they have a relationship that is hopeless, ask God to reconcile them.

You get the idea. Don't be afraid to ask for a miracle!

Let me tell you about a friend of mine who works in a local retail store. This is not his dream job but he needed a job, so he took it, and he asked God to use him in that store to bless the people around him. He began with prayer. After working there for a while he got to know one his boss pretty well. His boss made it clear that he's not a Christ-follower, but because of their friendship the topic of God, or “religion” as his friend calls it would come up. As they got to know each other my friend learns that his boss has a son with chronic health problems; some serious stuff. One day, he noticed his boss seemed kind of down and he just asked him, “Is something wrong?” And the guy says “Yeah, now my son has broken out in hives; really severe hives. And the doctors couldn't do anything about it, and he can't go to school so he's at home by himself (the guy is a single dad) and I'm just really worried.” And my friend said, “Well, do you mind if I pray for God to heal him?” He wasn't sure what the guy would say, but without missing a beat, the guy said, “Sure, go ahead! Please do!” Well the store he works in is always really busy, full of people, so my buddy goes into the bathroom because it was the quietest place he could find to pray. And he simply prays, “God you know I love this guy and he's hurting, and I know what You can do, so please heal his son. Please take away his hives.” Then he heads on back to the sales floor. A couple of minutes later he sees his boss across the room and there's this astonished look in his eye. His boss walks across the store and says to him, “That prayer thing? It works! Your God must be



real because my son just texted me two minutes ago and said ‘Dad, you’d never believe it! All my hives are gone!’”

Did you catch that? A guy who is not a believer says, “Your God must be real...” Why? Because he saw the power of God at work! Don’t forget the power in your serving. The power of God! A couple years ago in Stavengar, Norway working at a state-run Lutheran Pentecostal church. If you understand those terms – they all contradict! But one of the things a group of people from the church did was to set up a tent in the middle of the town on weekends – busiest time of the week with a banner that simply said, “Healing Prayer.” And in the tent they had coffee and refreshments and anyone who wanted to could stop by and they would just pray for them and ask for God’s power to work. No weird stuff. Just praying. And what the pastor of that church said, “I don’t understand it, but when we pray for healing in our church, there is about a 10% success rate; but when we pray for healing out in the town square, sometimes it is more than 80%!” Wow! I don’t even know what all to make of that. But I know this. There is a power that God has and he wants to use it through your serving to bless the world around you and to help people find their way back to God!

Conclusion:

Ok, before we finish I have a couple specific challenges for you. So, start getting ready for action. But first let’s review how Jesus served and how we should serve:

- **Proximity:** That might sound obvious, but it needs to be said. And I’m not talking about your family. Our serving has to go beyond the walls of this building and also the walls of our home: where you work; where you play; where you hang-out; in your neighborhood. Some of us think this is something we have to add on to our life – no! This is something do while going through life! Remember: God has either **sent** you to the people you are to serve OR he is going to **send** you to the people you are to serve.
- **Perceptively:** First, seek to understand. Don’t assume you know the whole story. Don’t assume you know their pain.
- **Personally:** Whoever we’re called to serve we need to feel their pain.
- **Powerfully:** Ask God to do what only He can do!
- **Reciprocity: Allow people to serve you back!**

Here is a great example of a COMMUNITY couple serving right in their neighborhood...

Ok, before we go out and B.L.E.S.S. the world, I want to give you a challenge. Cause the last thing I want is for us to learn all these lessons from Jesus and not do anything.



Challenge #1: Relocate - God has either **sent** you to the people you are to serve OR he is going to **send** you to the people you are to serve. There is a small percentage of you who while you heard me talking about God moving you to be involved in a church plant or moving you to an under-resourced community to serve those people, there was something inside you (Holy Spirit) saying, “That’s me....I think I’m supposed to do that.” Here’s the challenge: I want you to begin those discussions with those close to you that you trust and to discern if that is what you are supposed to do. Relocate to the place and the people God has always meant you to serve. Big challenge. Not what you expected. You need to do that.

Challenge #2: 24 hour action – The rest of you, the larger percentage - while I was talking I have to believe there was at least one person who specifically came to mind. With the very first “P” of Proximity you got a mental picture of who it is that you are supposed to serve. It might be a neighbor who is going through a tough financial time. It might be a single mom you know, it might be a homeless person you walk by everyday. Here’s the challenge: Do something to serve that person **today!** In the next 24 hours. Not tomorrow. Not at some more convenient time. Now! You might immediately go and buy that homeless person lunch. You might buy groceries for that single mom. You might get a gift certificate for that family who is going through tough financial times. You figure it out. But if a person came to mind, I want you to take action in the next 24 hours.

Got it? Good! Remember, we are the people that God has chosen to bless the world. We reach out to those around us. We restore God’s dream where it is broken. We reproduce the mission in others. Why? So we can see the mission of Jesus accomplished – that people will find their way back to God.



Week 6 – Story

Big Idea: To bless people on the Jesus Mission, we will share the story of Jesus with people we are seeking to bless.

Intro: quote and recap

I wanna mention a quote to start things off today. It's attributed to Francis of Assisi, and you might have heard it before: "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." Sound familiar to anybody? Today we're wrapping up "Discover Your Mission Now", and in this series we've focused on the Jesus Mission of reaching people who are far from God and restoring our world to how it was meant to be. And we've talked about the acronym B.L.E.S.S. that lays out practical things we can all do each day to carry out the Jesus Mission where we live and work. The B is for... B=Begin with prayer, asking God "how do you want me to bless the world for You today?", and then the L is for.... L=Listen. Being people who are truly interested in the struggles and pains and challenges in the lives of people where we live and work. The E is for... E=Eat. To build genuine relationships that bless the world, we gotta eat with the people we're praying for and listening to, share a meal with them. Then the first S is for... S=Serve: Meeting others' needs in practical, impactful ways. And today, it's about the last letter in BLESS, the second S which stands for S= Share the Story. Sharing the story of God, the story of God in your life.

Sharing the story is scary

And I don't think I'd be exactly going out on a limb to say that most of us, of the five core missional practices in BLESS, this last one, this is the hardest. That's why I mentioned that quote, because there's another version of it that says "Preach the Gospel at all times. *If* necessary, use words." It's just one word different, but I think that one word makes a big difference, because "if" means a person might never actually have to ever talk to anybody themselves about God. And I get that. It's one thing for me to stand up here and talk to a room full of people about God, and it's a whole nothing for me to have a conversation about God with one of my neighbors or one of the guys I play basketball with. A pretty scary thing. But I think whether we think "if necessary" and "when necessary" really matters. Can't really spell "BLESS" with just one S.

Jesus and Nicodemus

Here's a story from the Bible about how Jesus shared the story one on one. "There was a man named Nicodemus who was a Pharisee and a Jewish leader. One night he went to Jesus..." (John 3:1) Here's the back story. The Pharisees were a very conservative, very educated, very influential bunch of religious leaders in Jesus' day. And the Pharisees butted heads with Jesus a lot. They were anti-Jesus



all the way, which is why Nicodemus comes to talk with Jesus at night. He's keeping his interest in Jesus on the Downlow. "He went to Jesus and said, "Sir, we know that God has sent you to teach us. You could not work these miracles, unless God were with you." ³ Jesus replied, "I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God's kingdom!" (John 3:1-2) So the conversation starts out with Nicodemus acknowledging that Jesus is *from* God because of the miracles He'd done, but notice Jesus doesn't say "Well, thank you very much, Nicodemus. Very nice of you to say that." He takes the conversation in a very personal direction. He says this thing about needing to be "born from above". That was a way out-there thing for Jesus to say because Nicodemus had always been taught and believed that things were fine between him and God because he was an Israelite by birth and abided certain by certain religious rules. Then Jesus says "you must be born from above"?

So Nicodemus says "How can a grown man ever be born a second time?" I don't think Nicodemus is really asking Jesus how it's anatomically possible. I think it's more, like "no way could that happen" "Jesus answered: I tell you for certain that before you can get into God's kingdom, you must be born not only by water (you know, like a mother's water breaking when the baby's born), but by the Spirit. Humans give life to their children. Yet only God's Spirit can change you into a child of God. Don't be surprised when I say that you must be born from above. Only God's Spirit gives new life. "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. (John 3:4-9)

Now this time Nicodemus, when Nicodemus says "How can this be?" he's genuinely befuddled. And with good reason. Jesus is turning his whole world upside down about what it means to find God.

"Jesus replied: 'How can you be a teacher of Israel and not know these things? If you don't believe when I talk to you about things on earth, how can you possibly believe if I talk to you about things in heaven? No one has gone up to heaven except the Son of Man, who came down from there.'" (John 3:10-13)

Jesus is saying, "I know this is hard to get your head around, but my story is not just a story of miracles on earth. I'm the only One on earth who knows about Heaven because I'm God in the flesh come from there." But Jesus is not done.

"And the Son of Man must be lifted up...Then everyone who has faith in the Son of Man will have eternal life. God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn people. He sent Him to save them!" (John 3:14-17)



When Jesus says the Son of Man must be lifted up, He’s foreshadowing his death (being lifted up on a cross) and says that people who come to personal faith in Him will have eternal life. And then He says one of the most often quoted verses in all the Bible, it’s John 3:16: You know the one that somebody is usually holding up on a piece of posterboard at the SuperBowl. It comes from what Jesus said to Nicodemus that night.

See, Nicodemus is expressing spiritual interest to Jesus, and Jesus shares the story: who He is and what He’s about and what Nicodemus can do if he wants to find his way back to God. That’s the second S in Bless; Sharing the Story.

Sharing the Story is necessary in order to BLESS

Now back to that quote, "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." I think we tend to prefer the “if necessary” version, because then we can tell ourselves, "IF I do a good enough job of cleaning up my act, IF I’m a kind and basically helpful person, or wear my Christian t-shirt, or have a Jesus fish on my car, then I don’t *have* to ever really *talk* to anybody about God. That’s the pastor’s job, not mine." And like I said, I do get that. Maybe you feel like “I don’t know enough about the bible, or “I’m not good with words”, or “I don’t want to come across as some kind of fanatic who gets in people’s faces about God.”

But the truth is, if we’re beginning with prayer, listening, eating, and serving people where we live and work, there will be times when we will get the opportunity to share the story of God and Jesus. And, yes, we need to be wise and sensitive in what we say, but when we get the chance, we gotta take it. Can’t spell BLESS without the second S. To BLESS the world like God wants us to, there *will* be times when words *will* be necessary.

Bible says “How can people have faith in the Lord and ask Him to save them if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear, unless someone tells them?” (Romans 10:14)

And think about it: could you imagine a relief organization saying "Feed the hungry: if necessary, use *food*?" Or a medical mission saying "Care for the sick, if necessary use *medicine*."

“Use words when necessary” was originally meant to encourage people to have their walk match their talk, but that’s not most of our’s problem. The problem is that most of us don’t *wanna* have to talk to anybody about God or Jesus directly. I think we get so concerned about not coming across as some kind of Jesus freak that we are silent on the biggest and best news, the best Story we could ever have the *privilege* of sharing. I mean come on: are we really more concerned about what people think of us than whether or not they find their way back to God?



The Story can make all the difference

A woman ([Jen Savini](#)) used to be a self-described atheist. She felt you had to be simple-minded and uninformed to believe in Jesus. Now she's a committed Christ-follower, and if you asked her about how that huge change happened in her life, she wouldn't tell you about intellectual and philosophical arguments for faith in Christ that swayed her. She never had any trouble dismissing all of that in her mind. What she would tell you about is how a close friend of hers told how Christ had changed her life. She said she didn't know what to do with that. It just kind of sat there inside her, tugging at her. She would say that this her friend's story sort of lived in her heart and mind for years, and that in her moments when she wrestled with the idea of a God who loved her, it was her friend's story of what God had done in her life that made all the difference.

There is a time WHEN words ARE necessary. And most times those times comes when we've developed a relationship with someone through prayer and listening and eating together. Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus, and no, we're obviously not Jesus, but there'll be something about your life that will be intriguing, that will keep tugging at people, and words will be necessary.

Look at this verse from the Bible along these lines. "But in your hearts set aside Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)

How to share the story

Here's a basic outline that's pretty easy to remember. My life before I committed my life to Jesus, what happened to bring me to faith in Him, and then how life is now. Before, during, and after. Just tell your story. You don't have to have a story like "I used to be a drug dealing Satan worshipper but ever since I found Jesus I pray ten hours a day and read the Bible all the time." That verse says I read you just a moment about says what is central to the story of every Christ follower; that you have "set Christ aside as Lord in your heart". When you set Christ aside in your heart, it makes you different. You handle your finances differently, you handle your relationships differently, your approach to work and career differently. And this is as good a time as any to say this: If you met Jesus and it didn't really change you, it wasn't Jesus you met. If you're a Christ follower and following Christ hasn't really changed you, whoever you're following, it's not Jesus. At the very least, finding your way back to God in Jesus means you can say you no longer put any hope in religious activity or personal morality for your eternity; your *only* hope is God's *only* Son. His life, His death, His resurrection. So maybe getting ready to BLESS others by sharing the story means doing some soul searching about whether or not you've really set aside Christ as Lord in your heart, in the very core of who you are?



But back to sharing the story. Whenever you get the chance, share the story: Start with how things used to be before you found your way back to God, then talk about how you found your way back to Him, and then talk about how things are different now with Jesus in your life. Your life does not have to be all rainbows and cupcakes afterward. Just keep it real and tell your story.

Being willing and asking God for opportunities

Sharing your story is not about feeling comfortable doing it, it's being willing to tell the story. It's ok if you don't feel like it or the thought of it kind of freaks you out. But I encourage you even as I encourage myself to ask for God to give you opportunities to share the story and be willing to tell the story whenever you can. Ask God to bring opportunities your way, particularly with the people that you are listening to, eating with and serving. It's ok if you don't feel like it. Just ask yourself: do I care more about my own comfortability and what others think of me than I do about whether people find their way back to God? Of all the things we can ask God for, what could we ask for that's more important than asking Him to BLESS others by giving us a chance to share the Story?

Here's one person's story of not only finding their way back to God, but how being on mission with God has become central to his life and is impacting the lives of others.

(Pastor's share an illustration of someone coming to faith in Christ here)

Conclusion and matches thing

You know what JR is talking about? He's talking about his life being used of God to further the Jesus Mission of reaching and restoring people, and reproducing that mission in the lives of others. He's discovering his own mission in life within the Jesus Mission and helping reach and restore people and reproduce the Jesus Mission in the lives of others. And you can too. Let the main focus of your life become blessing the world. Begin with prayer, listen, eat, serve, and share the story.

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