

BIG IDEA DISCUSSION GUIDE

HOW TO BLESS YOUR NEIGHBOR



WEEK 1 – BEGIN WITH PRAYER

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:12-16

ICEBREAKER AND OPENING THOUGHT

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

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

LIFE APPLICATION

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

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

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

CHALLENGE

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

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WEEK 1 – LEADER’S GUIDE

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:12-16

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

Help the group to explore their experience of prayer.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

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LIFE APPLICATION

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

CHALLENGE

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

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WEEK 2 – LISTEN

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:35-43

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

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

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

LIFE APPLICATION

6. Read this quote from David Augsburger and discuss your experience with being heard:
"Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable."
7. We often fake-listen, just waiting for our turn to talk or to turn the conversation to something that affects us. How hard is it to listen without actively formulating a response?

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8. Listening is a humbling act; it requires admitting that perhaps we can't anticipate what the other person wants to talk about or that maybe their needs are different than we'd thought. What does it feel like to actively listen?

CHALLENGE

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

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WEEK 2 – LEADER’S GUIDE

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:35-43

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

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

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

LIFE APPLICATION

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

CHALLENGE

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

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WEEK 3 – EAT

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 9:9-13

ICEBREAKER

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

OPENING THOUGHT

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

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

“When we invite friends for a meal, we do much more than offer them food for their bodies. We offer friendship, fellowship, good conversation, intimacy, and closeness. When we say, ‘Help

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yourself... take some more... don't be shy... have another glass...' we offer our guests not only our food and drink but also ourselves. A spiritual bond grows, and we become food and drink for one another." -Henri J.M. Nouwen

LIFE APPLICATION

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

CHALLENGE

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

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

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WEEK 3 – LEADER’S GUIDE

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 9:9-13

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

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

BIBLE STUDY

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

LIFE APPLICATION

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

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CHALLENGE

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

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WEEK 4 – SERVE

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

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

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

LIFE APPLICATION

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

CHALLENGE

This story foreshadows the death of Christ on the cross, where we see the ultimate act of love. This love has been changing the world for the last 2,000 years, and the most vivid picture of

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love we can paint is to serve others the way Jesus served us. May we know the love of God through Christ. May we learn to value the things Jesus values. May we be a people who seek not to be served but to serve others.

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WEEK 4 – LEADER’S GUIDE

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

TIPS ON LEADING THE DISCUSSION

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

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WEEK 5 - STORY

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

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

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

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

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

LIFE APPLICATION

7. D.T. Niles said, "Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread". How do you understand that statement?
8. The newly sighted man from John 9 laid out a simple template for sharing your story. Take the rest of the time giving everyone a chance to share these three components of their story:

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- a. My Life before Jesus: The man declared “I was blind”. What was your life like before you met Jesus? Or if you grew up in church knowing all about Jesus, what was your life like before you got serious about following him? Your story begins with who you were ...
- b. How I met Jesus: The man declared, “He put mud on my eyes”. How you met Jesus is an important part of your story. How did you find your way back to God? Did a friend invite you to church, a family member introduce you to Jesus? Did you go through a hard time?
- c. My Life Since I met Jesus: “Oh, I was blind... But now I see”. What difference has finding your way back to God made in your life? How are you different? What has changed about your perspective? How has knowing Jesus impacted how you walk through both the good and the hard things in life?

CHALLENGE

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

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WEEK 5 – LEADER’S GUIDE

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

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

SCRIPTURE

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

ICEBEAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

Help the group to explore their experience of prayer.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

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

LIFE APPLICATION

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

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

CHALLENGE

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