



Living the
BLESS
Practice

the one who blesses others is abundantly blessed

proverbs 11:25 (MSG)

What is the BLESS practice?

BLESS is a simple practice of sharing your faith with others.

BLESS stands for:

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B

Begin with prayer

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Listen and be aware of the needs of those around you

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E

Eat with your neighbors, co-workers and friends

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S

Serve, look for ways to be a servant to others

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S

Tell your story, share your faith...after you have prayed, listened, had a meal, and served.
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What's the Why?

We are blessed and we are called to be a blessing. A large part of how we bless others is to share who Jesus is with our friends, co-workers and neighbors.

Our hope is that we as the Westwood community would embrace the BLESS practice. By actively thinking in terms of BLESSing others daily, it will become a natural outflow of our lives that draws people around us to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

In Mathew 28:19–20 Jesus echoes what God has been telling us throughout the Bible. He says, “Go!” Go into all the world and make disciples.” He is inviting us to share his heart for reaching the world. We are his strategy for bringing the world into a relationship with him.

BLESS is a practical, everyday way to talk to those in your sphere of influence about having a relationship with Christ—to give you a tool to “Go.”

At each step of the way, you’ll see that you can do this. Whether it is pray, eat or serve, you will be able to say, **“If that’s what helping people to find their way back to God is all about, I can do that!”**

BLESS is about engaging in everyday interactions that bring the hope of Christ to others.

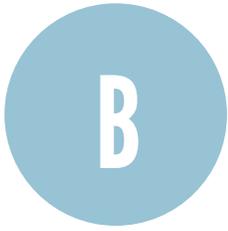
Ready to get started?

Watch the Videos

Want to learn more about BLESS? Head over to RightNow Media. You’ll find videos from Westwood’s pastors that walk you through BLESS and give you tips and encouragement on sharing your faith with others.

If you are new to RightNow Media, we encourage you to check out these and other videos. There is no fee to use it. Called “the Netflix of Bible studies,” this online resource has over 10,000 videos from leading Christian authors and speakers, as well as great children’s programs that you can watch from your phone, laptop or tablet.

Go to westwoodcc.org/rightnowmedia to get started!



BEGIN WITH PRAYER

**“Prayer is the real work.
Evangelism is just the mopping up.”**

– ANONYMOUS

Sharing your faith with other people can often seem best left for those with the gift of evangelism, the pastor of the church, or someone, anyone other than yourself.

It may be surprising to learn that the first part of evangelism is prayer and often the response you hear when people learn this is – **well I can do that!**

Begin by making a list of people you might BLESS. Things get done when we are focused and intentional. A list can help focus our attention upon those we hope to reach for the Lord.

Focus your efforts by investing in three people.

Start with those in your sphere of influence:

- Give priority to those who don't attend a church
- Family
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Neighbors
- Casual acquaintances (mailman, gas station clerk, etc.)

Pray for the people on your list daily.

One very powerful truth is that what we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18). As believers, Jesus has given us authority to “bind” all the unseen hindrances which keep people from the truth. Likewise, he has given us authority to “loose” the power of God through the Holy Spirit. In other words, prayer helps make the soil fertile before we start planting seeds.

Be sure to pray each day for the three people you've chosen. We are responsible for prayer and sowing the seeds of truth, but it's God who makes things grow.

Here are some additional things you can pray for:

- That God would give you opportunities to do good for them. (*1 Corinthians 3:5-7; Colossians 4:3*)
- That God would give you wisdom to make the most of these opportunities. (*Colossians 4:4-6*)
- That God would give you boldness to say what needs to be said. (*Ephesians 6:18-20; Romans 1:16*)
- That those you are relating to will have opportunities to hear the truth.
- That, as you share your story, those whom you are telling will have open hearts, receptive to hearing your story. (*Matthew 13*)

Who is God calling you to BLESS?

- 1
- 2
- 3

A few prayers to get you started.

For Neighbors

“God, I want to lift up my neighborhood to you. I know you want this neighborhood to be touched with your love. And I know you have placed me here to be your ambassador – to help my neighbors grow close to you. I pray you would open up doors for me to talk to everyone about you. But today, I specifically want to pray for _____ and _____. Would you open a door for me to spend time with them, to listen to them, and to eat with them? Thank you Father. Amen.”

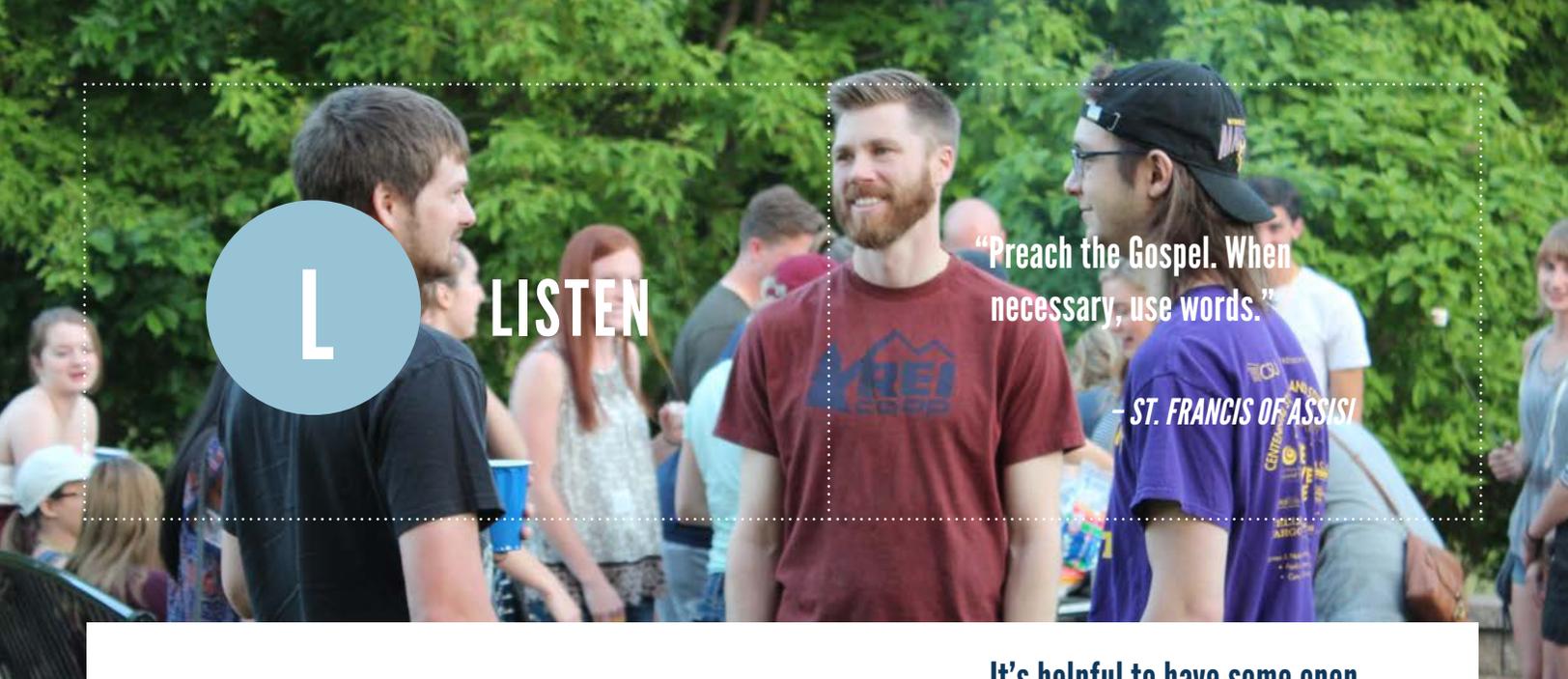
For Co-workers

“God, talking to my work friends is challenging. Our work environment does not encourage sharing of our faith. But I know you have called me to reach out so I want to lift up _____ and _____. Will you create an opportunity for me to have lunch with these people so I can ask them how they are doing? And Lord, would you open an opportunity some day for me to tell my story to them? Thank you God. Amen.”

For Relatives

“God, talking to my family about my relationship with you is hard. I have tried to talk to them – even inviting them to church, but they just don’t want to have anything to do with this. Father, would you open a door for me to be able to serve them? I specifically pray for _____ and _____. They seem so distant from you – please provide an opening for me to share more with them. Thank you Father. Amen.”





L

LISTEN

“Preach the Gospel. When necessary, use words.”

— ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

A man was going to a party where he would be meeting his wife's co-workers for the first time. He rehearsed various scenarios in his mind in which he tried in different ways to impress them.

On the way to the party, the man decided that, instead of trying to impress anyone, he would spend the evening simply listening to them and summarizing what they had just said, responding with phrases like, “I understand what you're saying – you feel strongly that. . .” and “Let me see if I understand what you mean. . .” He also avoided voicing his own opinions, even though at times it meant biting his tongue to keep from doing so.

Each person he talked to during the evening seemed content to be listened to without interruption. A number of people told his wife what a remarkable person he was. The word “charismatic” was used by one person to describe him, while another said he was one of the most “articulate” people she had ever met.

Could it be that charisma and brilliance have as much to do with how we listen as what we say? Imagine a world where people actually listen to one another, rather than just waiting for the other people to stop talking so they can give their opinion.

— ANNIE B. BOND (8/25/05) care2.com

Of course, at some point we will need to talk, but how about focusing on 80% listening?

At this point just listen and learn where they are. You'll gain a sense of where they are at in their journey.

It's through listening that we gain an understanding of many things, including their spiritual understanding, their background, the possible ways in which we can serve them, fears, wants, desires, etc. Remember, at this point you are just listening and learning more about them. This builds trust and comfort into the relationship. It is very difficult to be effective in sharing your story if you have not first listened.

Listening is part of sharing my story? I can do that!

It's helpful to have some open-ended questions in mind. You can find some good examples here:

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What is your favorite memory from childhood?

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What was your high school experience like?

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What are some fun activities you like to do with your kids?

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What do you like to do for fun?

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What do you want to be doing in five years?

.....
If you could have the perfect job, what would it be?

.....
Do you attend church around here? Did you grow up going to church?



EAT

“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!”

– ALAN HIRSCH AND LANCE FORD, *RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW*

Many are surprised to find that sharing a meal with people has a lot to do with evangelism. It’s not hard to imagine some of you saying right now – **Eating is part of sharing my story? I can definitely do that!**

So whether you are anchored in a secluded cove on a boat during the summer, having a tailgating party before a fall high school football game, or having neighbors over for a winter evening at home, people share the most interesting things about their lives over a meal. Of course one hindrance to sharing a meal is wanting to make it too elaborate and then feeling you don’t have the time to prepare. But the rule of thumb is to keep it simple – save the foie gras and rack of lamb for some other time. After all, it is all about the relationship around the meal, not the meal itself.



Recipe for Non-cooks

“...Begin by inviting people over. ORDER PIZZA and serve it with a GREEN SALAD and a BOTTLED SALAD DRESSING... Focus on making people comfortable, on creating a space protected from the rush and chaos of daily life, a space full of laughter and safety and soul... I’m not talking about cooking as performance, or entertaining as a complicated choreography of competition and showing off. I’m talking about feeding someone with honesty and intimacy and love, about making your home a place where people are fiercely protected, even if just for a few hours, from the crush and cruelty of the day.”

– SHAUNA NIEQUIST, *BREAD AND WINE*



SERVE

“For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”

– MARK 10:45

We understand our call to be like Jesus. And Jesus was a servant. His entire ministry is a stunning example of serving wherever he went—from his first miracle in Cana, to the feeding of the 5,000, to the simple expression of washing the feet of his disciples—Jesus served, that’s how He lived life.

So often we think in terms of going on a mission trip or serving people in a shelter in the inner city. Those things are great, but we can start with right where we are. Look around – to your neighbors, to the people you work with, or how about the parents you sit on the sidelines with while watching soccer? Start there. Everyone wants to do something big for God, but that big thing could be right next door.

As we set about to serve and share our lives with those around us, we can take Jesus at his word and believe that people will, in time, give their lives to Christ. We need to claim that power to share our faith, and to see people drawn to him.

In thinking about Jesus and his service of people, reflect on these questions:

Who is in your proximity?

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Who can you reach personally with empathy?

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How can you powerfully serve them?

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It’s about finding a small thing you can do with great love.



S

SHARE YOUR STORY

“The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.”

— BRANDON SANDERSON

Here we are – the grand finale!

By now you have built a close relationship – and have earned the right to tell your story. Perhaps you have already been asked what makes you different. Whatever the case, this is your time to be more than a good neighbor and tell them the great difference God has made in your life.

When thinking about how to share your story, begin by asking God to give you wisdom as you write it down.

Yes, write it down!

Writing helps clarify our thoughts and focus our attention. Your objective at this point is to write freely without editing – just get all your ideas onto paper.

Think about your life BEFORE, DURING and AFTER coming to Christ.

Outline specific examples that relate to each of the following questions:

What was your life like before you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

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What were your attitudes, needs and problems? What did your life revolve around? What was most important to you? Where did you look for security, peace of mind and happiness?

How did you come to accept Christ and give him complete control of your life?

—

When were you first exposed to Jesus Christ? What were your initial reactions to Jesus Christ? What feelings did you struggle with right before your decision?

What happened after you trusted Christ?

—

What changes did you see in your life? How long did it take before you noticed any changes? What does Jesus Christ mean to you now?



SHARE YOUR STORY (CONT.)



Threading it together

Once you have thoughts on paper, begin writing your story. It's most important to share what your life was like before you knew Christ, how you came to know him, and what your life is like now.

It's best to avoid:

Criticizing the church, organizations or specific people

Mentioning denominations (can be confusing or polarizing)

Glamorizing sinful prior behavior

Christian jargon they may not understand (convicted, saved, born again, repentance, etc.)

It's best to:

Begin with a story or anecdote that your friend will connect with

Be positive

Be specific

Be realistic, knowing that Christ does not remove all of life's problems, but he does walk us through them

Make sure your conclusion connects to your ongoing faith walk with Christ

Go over your story several times so you can communicate it naturally

Have a practice conversation with a friend or family member

Telling your story

Now that you have thought through your story, it's time to share it with the individual with whom you have cultivated a relationship.

Here are some helpful thoughts:

Be prayerful. Respond to God promptings about the right time and place for sharing your story.

Be natural and conversational. Never argue about faith or pressure your friend for a decision – the results are up to God.

Be open to the Holy Spirit who will help you relate specifically to the individual with whom you are sharing.

Be confident, knowing that God has used you to plant a seed or "water" someone's growing faith.

I've "BLESSED," now what?

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Keep practicing BLESS. It will enable you to grow closer to people. God will open up doors, because trust opens the door.

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2

Remember, God is always working and much of what God is doing we don't get to know in the moment.

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3

If someone is ready to receive Christ, leading them to do so in prayer is as simple as ABC:

A

Acknowledge: "Lord I acknowledge that I am sinful. I've failed you, I want to be made right with you."

B

Believe that Jesus is God, and that he came to set you free.

C

Commit to following him and being made new every day.

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