



HG245: BLESS
Begin With Prayer

Luke 6:12-22

Home Group Study Notes

25 September 2022 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Share one experience and/or event (whether on holiday;
at home; or in a newspaper, magazine, book or on TV)
which has had an impact on your Christian life over the
summer.



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG245: BLESS *Begin With Prayer*

Luke 6:12-22

Home Group Sermon

25 September 2022 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction This month we begin a new Home Group series using the acronym BLESS as a way to make Jesus known to others. This comes about as a result of conversations with the Leadership Team but also with many of you who've told me you are struggling to share your faith with others. When you've been touched by God's love, you can't help but want others to experience that same love. But how do you share it confidently without scaring them away or offending them? For most Christians, 'evangelism' is an intimidating word that suggests handing out leaflets to strangers or doing other awkward things. But what if there was a more organic, more authentic, way to share your faith by blessing people?

Using the example of Jesus, this series will look at five ways that you can bless others and by consistently living them out, you can affect the lives of your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Over the coming weeks, we're going to look ways to BLESS others through Prayer, Listening, Eating, Serving and Sharing our faith Story. But be warned – you'll need to be proactive if it's going to work!

The BLESS tool was created to help you bring the love of God to others. The everyday rhythm of these five practices will not only change the world around you: family, friends, neighbours and colleagues - one person at a time. It will also begin to change you, too.

How Could Sharing 'Good News' Always End Up Feeling So Bad? When I first became a Christian, it was such a life-changing experience, my life was turned downside up rather than upside down, I wanted to tell everyone about God's love in/through Jesus. I was inspired by 1 Peter 3:15 to ... *always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* I have to be honest and say I wasn't very successful.

Part of that was because the prevailing Church culture of the early 80's was for Christians to disassociate themselves from non-Christians socially. How I wish I'd been given different advice at the time. I look back at the missed opportunities through Christian presence and friendship. I remember trying very hard to share my faith but I always felt quite hopeless. I always ended up feeling such a failure and I'm sure I didn't bless those I was talking too at the time. Though some friends ended up becoming Christians as a result of my witness, but that was often through lifestyle rather than words. But I'll come back to this when we look at the final S – Sharing your faith.

Jesus Begins With Prayer But we begin with prayer. Prayer was not only how Jesus began His day; it was how He began His whole ministry. In his account of Jesus's life, Luke wrote in Chapter 4, "*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.

Two chapters later, in Luke 6:12-16, when Jesus was getting ready to select those who would join Him on this mission, Luke wrote:

“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.”

If that had been me, I might have been tempted to skip the prayer part and just pick the guys I liked the most or who seemed to be the most gifted. But Jesus didn't; He spent the night in prayer before deciding on the twelve He would invest His life in and disciple. The stakes were high. These twelve would be the first ones He would bless with His life, and together they would form a community of friendship. Once they were ready, Jesus would send them out to bless the world.

You see, it's always been God's desire 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, their needs, and their status as God's chosen people. They didn't understand that the mission wasn't just for them to be blessed, but to be a blessing!

But God didn't give up on His dream of a people who would love one another and share His love. As Jesus blessed the twelve, He was renewing God's mission to the world. Scholars will tell you that these twelve disciples are a kind of 'replacement' for the twelve tribes. God was starting afresh His plan for the twelve tribes through these twelve soon-to-be apostles who would take the blessing to others – as we see in Luke 6:20-22.

Now, some of you might be wondering, Why does Jesus need to pray if He's God? Good question! Two reasons, firstly, even though Jesus was God in the flesh, to become a human being meant taking on human limitations. The Bible says He knows what it is 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. Secondly, Jesus lived a life that would be an example to us of how to be fully human and how we should live.

It's interesting to note that the disciples Jesus picked after praying weren't the obvious choices for starting a new spiritual venture. They were common fisherman, corrupt tax collectors, violent political revolutionaries and plain nobodies. People we would have certainly ignored or not noticed. But Jesus didn't. Why/How? He began with prayer.

1: What is Prayer? But what is prayer? There are many different views of what prayer is and how we should engage with it. But prayer is simply talking to God - in the way you would have a conversation with a family member or a friend. Sometimes we talk, sometimes we listen, and sometimes we just enjoy being in that person's company. And so, it is with prayer. Prayer involves what we call The Trinity. We pray **To** the Father (Matthew 6:9); **Through** the Son (Ephesians 2:18); **In** the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26).

Prayer is not some mystical enlightenment that only a chosen few are able to attain. Prayer should be a natural part of being a Christian and is, probably, the most important activity of our lives. We can pray about any situation /person/circumstance we choose. Dwight L. Moody: *The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoes.*

2: Why Pray? Apart from the fact that Jesus prayed, and we follow his example:

Prayer develops our relationship with God: All relationships are based on communication. It's a well-known fact that relationships break down because of a lack of communication. But with good communication, a relationship grows and flourishes. And it's this relationship with God for which we are created. And in this relationship, we find the very meaning and purpose of our lives and prayer keeps our relationship with God fresh, healthy and real! Prayer should never be considered as a one-way phone call like leaving a message on an answering machine. Prayer allows us to hear God – and it's vital that we listen.

Prayer satisfies our Spiritual hunger: Prayer satisfies that spiritual hunger we all have. It quenches our spiritual thirst. It refreshes our soul. You don't ask why a baby is making chuckling noises as they lie in their mother's arms: they just do it. There is something that is spontaneous and natural about prayer for a child of God.

Prayer works! Prayer not only changes us, it also changes situations. I'm sure many of you can share amazing examples of answers to prayer. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple: *When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't.*

4: How Do We Pray?

The Model of the Lord's Prayer: In Matthew 6:9-13, when Jesus introduces what we know to be The Lord's Prayer, he doesn't say: 'If you pray' but: 'when you pray.' He assumes that we will. These words of Jesus have become a universal language for pray. I recognise that prayer doesn't always come naturally; there are often times when you have to make a choice whether to pray. Sometimes, prayer can be hard work. Sometimes you have other things on your mind; sometimes you feel a million miles away from God. The Bible says we pray:

Always: The New Testament encourages us to pray always (1 Thessalonians 5:17). You don't have to be in a church to pray. You can pray as you walk down the street, you can pray on your bike, you can pray on the train/tube. You don't have to pray out loud - in fact, if you're praying on the train/tube, it might be help not to pray out loud! But you can pray in your heart.

Alone: *Go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father* (Matthew 6:6).

With others: Jesus said, Matthew 18:19: "... if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." In other words, he says there's a special power when we pray together.

Regularly: I think it's helpful to have set times to pray. I always find that whatever thoughts are on my mind in the morning tend to stay with me all day. And to start the day with prayer is a wonderful way to start the day (Psalm 5:1).

Who Is My Neighbour? For BLESS to have an impact on your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues you need to start praying for them and for opportunities to share your faith. On the back of your HG Diary, you'll find the 'Who Is My Neighbour?' map. The centre square represents where you live. The eight surrounding houses represent your neighbours (and family, friends and colleagues). Write their names in the surrounding eight squares. Don't get hung up on being geographically accurate; just think about the eight people who either live closest to you or those you have the most contact with who are not yet Christians.

So now the challenge is to set aside time every day to pray for each of these eight people by name. I'm not asking you to pray all night like Jesus did, but we can all start somewhere. In time you will find that you won't need the 'Who Is Your Neighbour?' map because you have memorized the names of these eight people that God is asking you to love. But this simple tool is a great way to get you started in praying for the neighbours where you live, work, or play.

Four Simple BLESS Tools As you begin to pray for these people, use these four simple tools to help you to do so – also printed on the back of your HG Diary.

PLAN Things that are important to us are written in our diaries. If you want to be intentional about setting aside time to pray, you need to plan for it. Perhaps you might decide to pray for five minutes before you get out of bed and five minutes at night before you go to sleep. Or you might set a reminder on your phone to pray during your lunch hour or some other time of the day. Plan to pray for your neighbours by name.

PREPARE Next, you need to prepare. As you pray, ask God to prepare your heart for the adventure. If we're going to take the mission of Jesus seriously, we need to prepare our hearts for all that is to come. Ask God to give you eyes to see how He is leading and the courage to follow Him. Be bold: ask Him to give you divine appointments with each of the people named, as well as others.

PLACES As you pray, make a mental map of the places you'll visit during the day. Ask God to help you be sensitive to your surroundings and guide you to places where He wants you to be a blessing.

PEOPLE Finally, ask God to show you how to be a blessing to your chosen neighbours and/or friends. As you pray, envision the faces of each of your neighbours and ask God to show you how you can be a blessing in their lives. Remember that when you pray for people you are already blessing them. Pray for their physical health, their relationships, their emotional well-being, their careers and their families. Just think of how you would want someone to pray for you and start praying for them in the very same way.

All of us have struggled, and continue to struggle, to share our faith with others. This BLESS toll seems to be one of the most practical, dare I say simple, ways that we show the love of Jesus to others and the best place to start is always in prayer. Following Jesus isn't meant to be comfortable; it's meant to be life-changing! There's no telling where He might send us and what He might lead us to do and who he might lead to him.

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Emmanuel Text 2022

**BUT THE PLANS OF THE LORD
STAND FIRM FOREVER, THE
PURPOSES OF HIS HEART**

Through all generations.

PSALM 33:11

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: What are your earliest memories of praying? Did you recite a particular prayer? Did you pray in a specific place or with particular people?

2: Right after Jesus was baptized, but before He began His ministry, He went into the wilderness to fast and pray (Luke 4). In Luke 6:12-16, we find that He prayed before He selected His disciples. What do you notice from these examples about the emphasis Jesus placed on time alone with God in prayer?

3: What do you find most challenging about prayer?

When have you found prayer to be most helpful?

4: Prayer is a conversation in which we talk to God, and He talks to us. Have you ever felt a prompting from God to reach out to someone?

How did you respond?

What was the result?

5: Use the 'Who Is My Neighbour' map and write down the names of the eight people where you live, work and play.

6: Pray for the eight people on your map and ask God to give you opportunities to BLESS them.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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