



HG249: BLESS
Share Your Story

John 3:1-17

Home Group Study Notes

27 November 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

What is your favourite story of all time? It could be a book, movie or bedtime story from when you were a child.



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 ...



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Home Group Sermon

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Introduction

There are several ways we can communicate without words. A nod of the head, raised eyebrows, a gurning face! And when it comes to loving our neighbour's and reaching people who are far from God, that's exactly how most of us hope we can do it: without words! It's true, isn't it? It's why we gravitate to the classic saying of Saint Francis of Assisi: "*Preach the Gospel at all times and where necessary use words.*" Can we really bless our neighbours and friends and change the world without words? That's what we're talking about this morning: our words - or more specifically, our stories.

My guess is that you could quickly get on board with the first four BLESS practices we've looked at during this series. Yes, they require some intention and effort, but they aren't particularly difficult to carry out. For the most part, they don't push you too far out of your comfort zone. However, this final S makes many well-intentioned Christians nervous or reluctant to move forward. But you can't spell BLESS with just one S. And you won't likely help anyone discover the love of God without using your words and your story.

1. Jesus Shares His Story

With this fifth and final letter of the acronym BLESS, I'm not asking you to do anything I haven't done. Better yet, I'm not asking you to do anything Jesus didn't do Himself. *Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night* (John 3:1-2a). Before we go any further, let me give you the backstory. Nicodemus was part of the group of haughty religious leaders we talked about in John 2 - the same group that accused Jesus of being a drunkard and a glutton because He ate with sinners.

They were a well-educated and influential group, and as you can tell, they were anti-Jesus which is why Nicodemus went to talk with Jesus at night. Something about His story had intrigued Nicodemus but he wasn't about to get caught actually talking to Him. So, Nicodemus kept his interest in Jesus quiet. He went to Jesus and said: *Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.* (John 3:2-3)

The conversation starts out with Nicodemus acknowledging that Jesus is from God because of the miracles He'd done. Notice Jesus doesn't say, "Well, thank you very much, Nicodemus. It's great to hear you say that." Instead, Jesus takes the conversation in a very personal direction. He tells Nicodemus he needs to be "born from above."

This concept is difficult for Nicodemus to believe. He had always been taught that everything was fine between him and God. After all, he was an Israelite by birth and obeyed the religious rules. Yet Nicodemus is curious, so he asks Jesus: *How can someone be born when they are old?* "Nicodemus asked. *"Surely, they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born! How can this be?"* Nicodemus asked. (John 3:4-5, 9) Nicodemus seems to be genuinely intrigued by what he's hearing. Jesus is turning his world upside down about what it means to know God. Jesus goes on to ask Nicodemus telling questions and then starts sharing His story.

This is where it gets good: *No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man* (John 3:13). Jesus has just said that He’s from Heaven, and if you know anything about the Old Testament and what ‘Son of Man’ means (check out Daniel 7), He’s just said He’s God in the flesh. As a scholar of the scriptures, Nicodemus would have received this message loud and clear. But Jesus isn’t finished! He continues this eternity-altering conversation, sharing more of His story: *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him* (John 3:14-17).

Here, He foreshadows His death and even says why He has to die. Then He just drops the mic: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16). Now that’s how you tell a story! Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the middle of the night with a red-hot spiritual interest. Jesus knows this is a time when it’s necessary to use words. So, He shares the story of who He is, what He’s about, and what Nicodemus can do if he wants to find God and experience eternal life. Sounds easy, doesn’t it?

2. Why Are We Reluctant To Share Our Stories?

If we’re going to bless others and share the good news of Jesus, there will be times when words **are** necessary. There’s just no getting around it. And yet, most of us hold back, even when we know we have the opportunity to say something that could make a difference to someone’s life.

Have you ever had the feeling that you should say something? You know, that moment in a conversation when you get that fluttery feeling in the pit of your stomach, or you hear that voice inside your head that says, This is it! I have. At times, I’ve acted on it. Other times, I haven’t. Even though the words were on the tip of my tongue, I stopped myself. Then before I knew it, the opportunity was gone! Why did I hesitate? And why do we often hold back from sharing our story? A few reasons:

a: I don't have what it takes. Maybe you’ve bought into the lie that says, “I just don’t have what it takes.” So many people think sharing their story is only for super religious people who understand the Bible backward and forward. After all, what if a debate breaks out or someone asks a question you can’t answer? You won’t have all the answers to people’s most challenging questions. But what you can do is to promise to look it up and get back to them with an answer. When Jesus sent His disciples out to share His good news, He said to them: *do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* (Matthew 10:19b-20). Somebody once told me, “Good news is better than good arguments.” When you use your words to share the love of Jesus with your friends and neighbours, you aren’t speaking the good news on your own. If you’re following Jesus, you have the Spirit of God living inside you. You actually do have what it takes!

b: I don't want to impose my beliefs on my friends and family. You’ve likely seen the stereotypes, whether in movies, on the news, or social media. It’s those angry Christians trying to ram the Bible down people’s throats. If that’s what you’re afraid of, good! Be afraid. Be very afraid! Humbly sharing the difference that following Jesus has made in your life is not imposing your beliefs on anyone. I love this classic quote from D. T. Niles, because it reminds me of what I’m really doing when I share my story: *Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.* If you believe what you’ve found in Jesus is good news - the most life-changing, eternity altering news you could ever share, then why wouldn’t you use your words to tell others about it? To keep it to yourself would be like hoarding bread when others are going hungry.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved* (Romans 10:13). But then he goes on to ask: *But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?* (Romans 10:14).

Read this verse again, but this time swap out the word ‘someone’ for your own name: “And how can they hear about him unless (your name here) tells them?” What you say can help point people desperate for food to life-saving bread. Your story is compelling (not imposing) because it’s your story of how you found the love of God in Jesus.

c: *Sharing my story makes me feel uncomfortable.* Yes, you might feel uncomfortable telling your story! You might even get nervous or lose your train of thought. You could stumble over your words. But are you really going to let your feelings stop you from sharing words that could mean the difference in the life and eternity of your friend? While the discomfort is real, the nervousness and awkwardness you experience is so worth it when you consider the impact and significance. People may disagree with what you have to say but they can’t deny your experience/story. And remember, sharing your story doesn’t have to be complicated. Let me show you what I mean.

3. I Was Blind But Now I See

In John 9, one of Jesus’s closest friends and disciples tells us about a man who simply shared his life-changing story with his neighbours. *As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth* (John 9:1). We don’t know this man’s name. We only know that he’s blind and has been all his life. Then a little later, John tells us he’s “the man who used to sit and beg” (John 9:8).

So not only is he blind, but he’s also a beggar. As Jesus comes across this man, He does a very strange thing. He spits on the ground, makes mud from it, and spreads the mud over the blind beggar’s eyes. If this were my story, I’m not sure I would’ve loved the idea of someone spreading spit-filled mud on my eyes. But the blind man cooperates and follows Jesus’s next instructions to wash out his eyes. Then look what happens: *So, the man went and washed and came back seeing* (John 9:7)! A miracle!

This man who had been blind since birth suddenly can see! Can you even imagine? For years you’ve lived in utter darkness, and in a matter of minutes Jesus smears mud over your eyes, and voila! You can see clear as day. Obviously, this man is completely blown away - and he can’t keep quiet. When his neighbours ask him what happened, he says: *The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, “Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.” So, I went and washed, and now I can see!* (John 9:11)

Notice that this man can’t fully explain how it happened. And I’m guessing he was a little hesitant to share about the spitting part, so he simply tells them what Jesus did and how his life is now forever changed. What I love about this story is that we can’t always explain exactly what happened after we chose to follow Jesus either. We just know it happened. And that’s OK. Later, when the man is asked again about what happened, he simply says, *“I was blind but now I see!* (John 9:25). He didn’t try to quote Scripture or articulate theology. He simply shared his story: *I was blind but now I see!* (That might make a good lyric for a song!)

4. Sharing Your Story

I think this once-blind man’s story gives us a great framework for telling our own. It looks like this:

Part 1: *My Life Before Jesus.* “I was blind,” the man declared. That’s who the man was before he met Jesus.

Part 2: *How I Met Jesus.* “He put mud on my eyes,” the man would say. The man explains this strange first encounter with Jesus.

Part 3: *My Life Since I Met Jesus.* “Oh, I was blind but now I see!” That’s how this man would explain the difference that Jesus made in his life!

Storytelling is an art. Every great story has characters, a setting, a plot, a conflict, and a resolution. The character is who the story is about. The setting is the place where it happens. The plot is the beginning, middle, and end of the story. By simply telling your story in the three parts I've mentioned - you will include all five components of a great story and share yours in a way that is clear, concise, and compelling.

Yes, your story can change the lives of others—but it can also change your own! Why not write it down and share it with a trusted Christian friend. Make any changes they suggest and then store it to memory and ...

5. Ask God For An Opportunity To Share Your Story

Each one of us has a story to share. In 1 Peter 3:15, we read these words: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* The personal testimony is a time-honoured and effective method of sharing our faith. It is said that most people have a three-minute attention span (now 2.45 on R4 'Thought For The Day) and will listen to what we have to share about our Christian faith for about that time and, after that, they get bored or lose interest!

So, ask God for the chance to bless someone with your story. Don't sanitize it or romanticize it. Simply tell your authentic story. Tell them about:

Part 1: Your Life Before Jesus.

Part 2: How You Met Jesus.

Part 3: Your Life Since You Met Jesus.

Nicodemus was forever changed after his late-night encounter when he heard Jesus's story. In that moment, he not only found forgiveness and a hope for eternity, but he also discovered his purpose. Later in his Book, John made sure to tell us that Nicodemus was one of two men who prepared the body of Jesus for burial after His crucifixion (John 19:39-42). Christian tradition and many biblical historians tell us that Nicodemus was so determined to bless the world in the name of Jesus that he was eventually martyred for refusing to deny his belief. He heard the story of Jesus and his life was changed forever.

Your story has that power too. Be bold, be willing to be stretched out of your comfort zone and ask God for an opportunity to share it. But remember it will be what people see in your life that gives your words credibility.

Continue to pray for those eight people you've been praying for since we began this series back in September. Look for opportunities to BLESS them. Begin with Prayer; Listen with Care; Eat/experience life together; Serve in love and Share your faith Story. As I said at the beginning - you'll need to be proactive if this is going to work. And the Christmas season, quite co-incidentally (not!) is the perfect time to begin to BLESS those around you.

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Emmanuel Church Text for 2022

***“But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever,
the purposes of His heart through all generations.”***

Psalm 33:11



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: Read John 3:1-17. What do you find most interesting about this encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus? How much of what Jesus said do you think Nicodemus understood?

2: When did you first come to understand the meaning of John 3:16? “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” How would you convey the meaning and impact of these words if someone were to ask you about them?

3: Which of the "Reluctant Reasons" for sharing your story do you relate to most?

4: Read John 9:1-11. How would you have felt if you were the man who was blind since birth and suddenly could see?

How would you explain what happened?

What is your reaction to the simplicity of his story: I was blind but now I see?

5: If someone were to casually ask you: How did you become a Christian? How would you respond?

6: We hope this BLESS series has been informative and helpful. What, out of all that we have studied, really sticks in your mind? What has strengthened your faith the most? What has challenged your faith the most? What has inspired you the most?



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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