



Discover


Discover Your Mission Now



5 Simple Practices To Change Your World

Dave Ferguson

With Jon Ferguson and Tim Sutherland
Edited by Eric Bramlett



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I became a **generous** Christian in 2008.

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That's more like it

You've got a water cooler and then you've got NewThing. We're more than an individual thing; we're a conversation, a connection, a relationship, a culture... What we're doing is bigger than the original. It's more powerful, more messy, and a ton more fun. And you could be a part of it. Become a leadership resident and get everything you need to plant a church, develop artists or even lead a network. This isn't just any thing, it's a new thing.



new thing

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Dave Ferguson thinks like a missionary and writes like a pastor! This is an enormously practical resource to catalyze and mobilize all Christians to engage in everyday mission in their own neighborhoods. Dave understands how to motivate churches to keep the mission of God in the forefront of their thinking. Both winsome and inspirational, this is timely advice for us all.

—Michael Frost, author, *The Road to Missional* and
The Shaping of Things to Come

I'd endorse anything Dave puts down on paper because I know it will be practical. *Discover Your Mission Now* does not disappoint. I love how missionary theology and practice come together in this great resource!

—Hugh Halter author of *Tangible Kingdom*

Dave Ferguson is a friend and mentor. He's a leader of leaders that will help you find your personal passion and revise your vision. Read this book and you will discover your mission now!

—Mark Batterson, Best-selling author and
Lead Pastor of National Community Church

If there is a master key to leading a purposeful and effective life, it is clarity of mission. Dave Ferguson, one of the bright lights in American Christianity these days, has developed a sure fire, fresh, and simple approach for you to discover the "good works prepared beforehand" (Ephesians 2:10) by God for you alone to do. A simple and practical resource to help you change your world.

—Bob Buford, Founder, Leadership Network; Author,
Halftime and *Finishing Well*

One of the most important aspects of turning an existing congregation in a missional direction is the formation of every church member into local missionaries sent into neighborhoods and public spaces. Dave's new book, *Discover Your Mission Now* provides the practical advice needed for unlocking the missionary latent within us all.

—Brad Brisco, Church Planting Strategist; Author of
Missional Essentials

One of the ways I know I love a book is when I keep reaching for my pen and highlighter. My version is now full color because of all the notations and flagging I've done. Dave Ferguson has given the body of Christ an immeasurably valuable resource in *Discover Your Mission Now*. Chock full of real world stories, principles, and practices, this is a book you are going to want to pass on and that you can point to and say, "This is what I am talking about. This is the doing the Jesus stuff we all want to be about."

— Lance Ford, author of *Right Here Right Now* and
Missional Essentials

Dave has not just written a book, this is a manual of proven ways for you and everyone you know to find the mission that God has for their life. I recommend this to everyone in search of their God-given purpose.

— Pastor Charles Jenkins, Senior Pastor
Fellowship Chicago Church

Dave and his team at Community Christian continue to be map-makers for the rest of us. They are discovering a more primal and biblical identity of church as movement, not institution, as a family, not just an organization, as mission-sent people, not just spectators. This book is practical, specific, and reproduce-able.

— Rob Wegner, Pastor of Life Mission,
Granger Community Church; Co-author of *Missional Moves*

If every thoughtful shepherd were to encourage their people to read this book, they could unleash an army of missionaries out into their cities—NOW! *Discover Your Mission Now* gives us a great pattern to follow that can transform a life.

— Caesar Kalinowski, Director, GCM Collective;
Cofounder, Soma Communities

The premise behind *Discover Your Mission Now* is spot on! Every ministry leader needs a clear set of rhythms to hold people together as they engage culture. I would highly recommend this book to anyone leading a small group or missional community. This is another great resource from Dave and the ministry team at Community Christian and New Thing.

— Matt Smay, Co-founder, Missio; Founder of Missio Publishing;
Co-author of *And: The Gathered and Scattered Church*.

**Discover Your
Mission Now**

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Edited by Eric Bramlett**


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Acknowledgements

Discover Your Mission Now started as a Big Idea teaching series at Community Christian Church (COMMUNITY) to help mobilize every person and every small group to be on mission. As a result of this series we had 73% of our groups identify a mission, write their own mission statement and be commissioned for mission at one of our twelve locations during a weekend service. With a project that big there are a lot of people to thank.

A big thank you to the point person on our teaching team, Tim Sutherland. Timo, you are a genius!

Thank you so much to all of those who made up the writing team for this big idea: Tim Sutherland, Jon Ferguson, Austin O'Connor, Tammy Melchien, Shawn Williams, Carter Moss and Jake Kirchner.

A huge thanks to Eric Bramlett for his editing skills and determination to make sure we actually published this content.

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We also, could not have done this without the wisdom and experience of Kim Hammond, our Aussie friend who constantly reminds us to leave behind the ninety-nine and go after the one. Thanks Kim!



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Thank you to my wife and best friend, Sue for doing a final edit to make sure we got the punctuation and grammar correct. I love you!

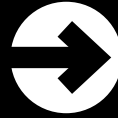
Thanks to Pat Masek for always trying to find time for me to write and for doing whatever it takes to get this project completed. You “get’er done!”

Thanks to our staff at COMMUNITY for being on mission and influencing our whole church to be on mission. I love this team of people!



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Introduction



You Have A Mission

You were born with a God-given mission for your life. Through each person that God brings into this world he also gives birth to a mission. It is knowing and living out your God-given mission that brings purpose, meaning and a fulfilling way to make a difference with your days. Exciting stuff, huh? And here is the good news – you are about to discover your mission in the pages of this book!

Five Missional Practices

The first chapter of this book is titled “Discover Your Mission” and it explains the mission of Jesus. As a follower of Jesus, you must know his overall mission before you can discover your part in the mission. The next five chapters explain the five missional practices of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, we should model our lives after his: do what he did, and practice what he practiced. Here is a secret we have discovered: these five missional practices are both how you do the mission, but also how you discover your own God-given mission for your life. Decide right now that as you learn these five missional practices you will implement them into your life for two reasons: first so that you can follow Jesus’s example in missional living, but secondly so that you can discover the mission for your own life!

Discover Your Mission Now

Some of you are early in your journey and it is exciting to think that God has a mission and you have a big role in accomplishing that mission. Others of you have known that this was true for a long time, but have never been given any clear biblical guidance on the mission of Jesus and the missional role he has



Discover Your Mission Now

for you. That is why I'm so excited that you are reading this book. Apply the five missional practices and this book will help you discover your mission, now!

Discover Your Mission



What do you have-to-do tomorrow? Most days I've got a long list of stuff that I have-to-do. Usually it's a list so long that it is impossible for me to ever get it done. How about you? What do you have-to-do tomorrow? The key phrase is "have-to-do." The problem with our have-to-do list is that it can be mundane, routine and often purpose-less. Think about your have-to-do list for tomorrow. It might include a place you have-to be, work you have-to-do, an appointment you have-to keep or a task that you have-to finish.

And here's the problem: if everyday is only filled with stuff you "have-to-do" you could go your whole life getting stuff checked off your list, but never discover your mission!

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis, one of the great thinkers of the last century wrote this: *"It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals."*¹ But for most of us, it's not so much "wishes and hopes," as it is just the same old stuff we have-to-do."?

I meet a lot of people who have long lists of "have-to-do's," but 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. He explained it this way...²

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.



Discover Your Mission Now

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 TV show, 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...



Video:
Dave's To Do List



Does your smart phone
like this? If not, go to:
newthing.org/todolist

Roll over...

Set the same old alarm clock and get up the next day – and you have-to-do the same old things all over again!

Too many people think that's how they have-to-do life. But I don't want the "same old." Do you? We've got one shot at this life.

A few years ago COMMUNITY decided that the timing was right for us to launch new campuses in the city of Chicago. At that point, we had nine campuses located in the west and southwest suburbs of Chicago. We were keenly aware of the dramatic need to reach the three million people living within the city limits of Chicago, and we currently had only one campus in the city. When we concluded that it was time to make a bigger impact in Chicago, Tammy Melchien moved to the Lincoln Square neighborhood to start a new campus. My brother Jon,



along with his wife, Lisa, and their two children, moved to the north side of Chicago to lead this new network of campuses. If you were to ask each of them why they chose to make this move, they would tell you, “After a lot of prayer and conversation, I came to the conclusion that this is something I can’t not do.”



Find out more about
COMMUNITY at
communitychristian.org

I think most of us want to wake up every morning with passion and purpose! Sure, there are lots of things we “have-to-do.” But I believe by God’s design there are also things that you can’t *not* do or that you *have* to do! 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 suggests that our calling is where our greatest passion meets the world’s greatest need.³ 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 through this book, you will never again settle for a life filled with checking off your “have-to-do” list. If you will apply what you learn from this book I believe you will discover a mission for your life so compelling that you simply *have* to do it!

Jesus and Samaria

Let’s look at a famous story in the Bible where Jesus talks about something for which he said, “I *have* to do.” The beginning of the story often goes unnoticed, but it starts like this:

“(Jesus) left Judea and set out once more for Galilee. But he had to pass through Samaria.” John 4:3-4 (WEB)

We could read that scripture one of two ways. We could read it like this: “Jesus had to go through Samaria.” Like it was a “have-to-do,” a “same-old.” Like he had no other choice and



no other option. Or, we could read it like this: “Jesus thought to himself, *I have* to go through Samaria.” Like there was a compelling cause and a greater purpose that caused something inside him to say, “*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. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews. They were the enemy. Samaritans were to Jews what Packers fans are to Bears fans. If you are a Bears fan, then you understand these feelings. If you are a Packers fan, well, I’m really sorry for you and your family.

Anyway, the Bible says that Jesus told himself, “*I have* to go through Samaria” – even though there were other routes that most every other Jew would have taken to avoid Samaria. But Jesus said, “*I have* to go through Samaria” because of a mission God has given me; there is a woman there *I have* to meet.

Jesus meets this Samaritan woman at a well where the whole community came for water. She was there at midday – the hottest time of day, when no one else was there. It was almost as if she was trying to avoid people. And when we do a little background check on this woman, we discover she had reason to try to not be noticed: She had been married five different times, and guy number six that she was currently living with was not her husband. She was all alone because either she was a woman with a very questionable reputation, or because of her personal failures, or because her community had rejected her. She likely came to the well by herself at this time of day for these reasons.

The stigma of her being a Samaritan or a woman with a questionable reputation didn’t stop Jesus from approaching her. 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 about her life-changing experience. The Bible says she left her water jar, went back into town, and told her neighbors, *"Come, see a man who told me everything that I did. Can this be the Christ?"* John 4:29 (WEB)

So what makes this story so important? Well, this story offers you and me three very important discoveries:

1. 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!"*
2. Second, we discover that we have a mission! As Christ followers, the Jesus Mission is our mission. We have a compelling cause and we have something we *have* to do!
3. Lastly we discover that the Jesus Mission is made up of three life-changing and world-changing elements: Reach, Restore and Reproduce.

Reach

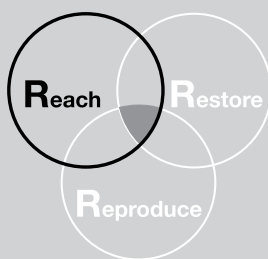
The first element of the Jesus Mission is Reach, and it's about reaching people who are far from God. The Samaritan woman was far from God. But don't take that to mean that she was



not spiritual. She was 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 went there. Jesus knew, “I *have* to go.”



Reach



Reaching people who are far from God.

She is a lot like my friend 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 have loved him most, Jack started drinking...a lot. And he started 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 led him to be jobless, homeless and all alone. Jack was living out of a local YMCA.

Even though Jack had been raised in the church and considered himself spiritual, he now found himself in a place that felt 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. Two years ago his search brought him to COMMUNITY and to my small group. And it was here that Jack took a huge step on his spiritual journey when he asked me if I would baptize him. When I asked Jack 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!



Every day there are people like Jack and the Samaritan woman around you and me. 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 stuff we “have-to-do.” They are people like just like me; people just like you - people who are still far from God! Jesus wants us to reach them. Our mission is to Reach them.

Restore

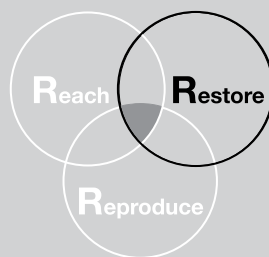
The second world-changing element of the Jesus Mission is Restore, and it’s all about restoring God’s dream for this world. God’s dream and desire from the very beginning is for us to live in perfect relationship with him and with each other. There were people in the Samaritan woman’s life that claimed to love her, but only used her; and because of that, and the choices she made, the dream God had for her life was shattered and broken.

There are people all around us similar to the Samaritan woman - 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 and didn’t. It might be that person you pass who is living on the street. It might be that person who struggles with an addiction and has yet to hit rock bottom. It might be someone who struggles because they are victims of an unjust system.

Some of them are people who have been marginalized or forgotten, like the single mom trying to raise kids on a poverty-level income, or the refugee who is all



Restore



Restoring God's dream for the world.



alone trying to make a home. Sometimes it's the child who doesn't have access to a good education simply because of the neighborhood in which he lives. Anytime you see people living their life in conditions or circumstances that are less than what God dreams for them, know this: Jesus wants to restore God's dream for their life. Our mission is to Restore them.

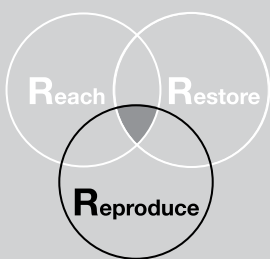
Reproduce

The eternity-altering and world-changing elements of the Jesus Mission include *Reaching*, *Restoring*, and lastly *Reproducing* 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 responds to this life-changing encounter with Jesus by taking the mission to her community. Look what it says: *"From that*

city many of the Samaritans believed in him (Jesus) because of the word of the woman who testified..." (John 4:39) She no longer wakes up thinking, "Go get water – that's what I have-to-do." Now she wakes up every morning thinking about sharing the love of Jesus and knows, "That is what I *have* to do!"



Reproduce



Reproducing the Jesus Mission in others.

When we first started COMMUNITY, we were just a handful of friends from college. But one thing we were sure of was our mission: "helping people find their way back to God." With

that clear calling and mission, each of us started intentionally investing in and apprenticing one other person in this mission. We began to reproduce the mission in others. And through apprenticing others there are now thousands of Christ followers on mission at COMMUNITY, and tens of thousands



of Christ followers on mission across the country and around the world through our networks of NewThing churches. That never would have happened had we not understood the third element of this world-changing mission of Jesus, Reproduce!

A great example of the power of reproducing can be seen in the growth and multiplication of our annual Christmas Gift Mart. The first year we held a Christmas Gift Mart, our Community 4:12 Director, Kirsten Strand and her team mobilized 100 volunteers, collected 800 gifts and raised about \$800 for one neighborhood school. Eight years later, we have reproduced in several ways and COMMUNITY now has four Christmas Gift Marts mobilizing 1500 volunteers, collecting 13,000 gifts and raising over \$18,000 for four public schools. During that same time we have apprenticed other churches across the country in holding their own Christmas Gift Mart and to date we are aware of at least fifteen Christmas Gift Marts! That is the power of reproduction!

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 have 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.



Find out more at
community412.org

When you put this all together you can clearly see the Jesus Mission. It's when we, as individuals and as the church, do all three: *Reach, Restore* and *Reproduce*.

And this is not just the church's mission; as a Christ follower, this is your mission! As the lead pastor of COMMUNITY, I

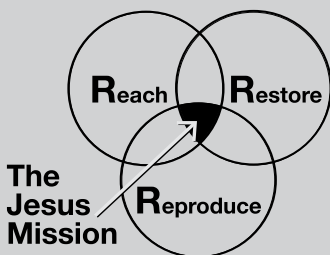


hold firm to the truth that it is no longer acceptable as a Christ follower to just know about the Jesus Mission. Most people who call COMMUNITY their church home would know that our mission statement is “helping people find their way back to God.” And I love that mission. I’m proud to say that our church’s mission is “helping people find their way back to God.” But it’s not enough for that to simply be our church’s mission. We want every person to live out the mission every single day! We want people waking up every morning asking, “What would it look like for me to be on mission today?” 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 Christ who

was not fully engaged in the mission of Jesus. Their conversion was also a commitment to the mission. Their baptism was their ordination!



Mission



**The intersection of the 3R's
creates the Jesus Mission**

So, if you are a Christ follower, you have a mission! You have a compelling cause for your life! God has a purpose for placing you on this planet! So, now the big question is this: “What is your part in the Jesus Mission?”

This book will help you discover your part in the Jesus Mission, and how to wake up everyday knowing, “This is what I *have* to do.” Some of

you, like me - are going to discover that your mission is in your neighborhood. For 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 are going to be a myriad of missions that will all help people find their way back to God. And I personally want to encourage you and cheer for you! We believe that every Christ follower should have a



missional story to tell. That's our goal for our church, and if you're reading this, that's my goal for you!

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. We call it the "blessing strategy." We see the "blessing strategy" in Genesis 12:2-3: *"I will bless you... You will be a blessing... All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you."* This "blessing strategy" can be summarized in five simple missional practices. And to help us remember these five simple missional practices of Jesus, we have expressed them in the form of an acronym that spells B.L.E.S.S. I absolutely guarantee that if you will put them into practice everyday it will change your world and your life from the same old "have-to-do" into an "I *have* to!"

Don't stop reading! The rest of this book, chapter by chapter, will spell out a simple (but not easy) way to be on the Jesus Mission as we seek to B.L.E.S.S. the world through these five missional practices.



Video:
The 3R's

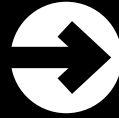


What's that thing up there?
Go to newthing.org/3rvideo



Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Which “R” (Reach, Restore, Reproduce) comes most naturally for you? Which one do you find the most challenging in your life? Why do you think that is the case?
2. Is there anyone in your life whom you could identify as “the woman at the well”? Maybe someone you see often but don’t know, or someone who is clearly a social outcast to whom you would be uncomfortable speaking? What are the barriers between you and this person?
3. How have you seen your relationship with Christ restore God’s dream for your life?
4. How are you currently working to restore God’s dream in your family? In your community? In the world?
5. What is one thing you can do this week to reach someone who is far from God, help restore someone’s life to be closer to the dream of God, or reproduce the Jesus Mission in someone else?



B - Begin with Prayer

L -
E -
S -
S -

I recently came across an absolutely fascinating book by Mark Russell called *The Missional Entrepreneur*.⁴ In the book, Mark references a study of two teams of missionaries that went to Thailand with distinctly different missional strategies. Based on their purpose for going to Thailand, you could call one team the “blessers” and the other team, the “converters.” The “converters” went with the sole intention of converting people and evangelizing everyone around them. 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 both teams for a couple of years and here are two interesting observations:

- First of all, they discovered that that the “blessers” had a greater social impact than the “converters.” This proved that the “blessers” 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 “blessers” also had almost 50 times as



many conversions than the “converters!” The “blessers” were 50 times more successful at helping people find their way back to God!

This should not be surprising to us. As I mentioned in the last chapter, from the very beginning, God’s way to change the world has been a “blessing strategy.” God blessed Abraham relationally, financially and spiritually; but the purpose of that blessing was not for him to simply receive that blessing. The intent of the blessing for Abraham and all who followed after him, including Jesus and us, is that we are being blessed to be a blessing. This is a subtle but important point – if you do not get this you will never discover your mission in life and nothing else you read in this book will make any sense! Every single blessing you’ve ever received was given to you so that you would in turn be a blessing to others. Yes, you were blessed to be a blessing!

And being a blessing to people is both how you accomplish the Jesus Mission and how you discover your own mission. So what does it look like to bless people or to be a “blesser?” Great question!

B.L.E.S.S.

The answer to that question comes through our five simple missional practices that make up the acronym: B.L.E.S.S.

B - Begin With Prayer

L - Listen

E - Eat

S - Serve

S - Story

Looks simple enough right? Let me just say that for some of you there will be a temptation to quickly get them all done and



check off the list so you can say, “Done. Did it. I’m good!” That is not how it works! If you are just trying to get them done so you can say you checked them off, then this will simply be about you and your accomplishments, and not about being a blessing to others.

Another temptation is to dismiss these five practices because they seem too simple. Please don’t make that foolish mistake! For the last two years, our church staff team has been on a search for what you are reading now. 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. We talked to church leaders as close as Chicagoland and as far away as Seattle, Austin, Europe and Australia. We then took all that we learned and put it into the five simple practices of B.L.E.S.S. that you see here.



Video: B.L.E.S.S.
in a Minute or Less



QR codes are weird. Go to
newthing.org/blessinaminute

B - Begin With Prayer

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 of the acronym rules, but we knew prayer was the starting point, so just work with it! They do get better...

Divine Appointments

Let me start by telling you how a friend of mine applies this first missional practice. His name is Dean and he works with college students at Michigan State University. And every morning Dean prays for what he calls “divine appointments” — opportunities to talk to people whom God wants him to bless. And then he just goes through his day assuming that whomever 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 help him bless the world around him. I remember one story he told me about a time when he had a cancelled appointment. 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 came to mind, "Janice." He immediately sensed he was supposed to contact Janice and 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 the campus ministry small groups. So he called and asked her to connect over coffee. She said, "Sure."

When they met he 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 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." But then Janice interrupted, "No, that's not it. I just can't believe that you are here. Last night I went to my small group. 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 to bring someone to me today who could tell me how to become a Christian." She smiled and said, "And here you are. I can hardly believe it!"

I love talking to Dean because every single day of his life is a mini-adventure. I'm not kidding. Sure, he has his troubles and worries like everybody else, but no day is "have-to-do" 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: for my friend Dean, prayer is not only how you do the mission, but also how you discover the mission!



Jesus Began With Prayer

Do you know why my friend Dean does this? Because Jesus did this! When Jesus gets ready to select those who will join him on this mission, look what happens:

"In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray, and he continued all night in prayer to God. When it was day, he called his disciples, and from them he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he also named Peter; Andrew, his brother; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Simon, who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James; and Judas Iscariot, who also became a traitor. " Luke 6:12-16 (WEB)

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. Don't you think there were a few obvious first-round draft picks? A couple of blue chip prospects? Of course there were! But Jesus doesn't just do what makes sense to him; He spends the night in prayer before selecting the twelve. The stakes were high. The twelve he was about to select 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 that the "blessing strategy" was for God to bless them so they could bless others! We still have that very same struggle today. So never forget the blessing strategy and know whenever God blesses us, we are blessed to be a blessing to others.

In spite of our failure to remember that we are blessed to be a blessing, God doesn't give up on his dream of reaching and restoring the world. With the selection of the twelve apostles, Jesus renews God's mission to the world by picking twelve



new missional representatives. Many scholars will tell you that these twelve people (who are all members of the original twelve tribes) are kind of like the replacements for the twelve tribes. God is starting over. He refuses to give up, and once again he is renewing his plan for the twelve tribes through these twelve apostles.

Let's go back to the first missional practice of "B" – Begin With Prayer. You might be ahead of me wondering, "Why did Jesus need to pray if he's God?" Good question. 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.

No, we don't know exactly what happened that late night and early morning when Jesus 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.



In spite of our failure to remember that we are blessed to be a blessing, God doesn't give up on his dream of reaching and restoring the world through us.

It's interesting to note that the guys Jesus picked after praying weren't the obvious choices for a starting lineup. The group was comprised of common fishermen, corrupt tax collectors, violent political revolutionaries and several whom were just nobodies!

This was a group of people that most of us would have walked right by without noticing. But Jesus began with prayer, and God was telling him that these were the people to carry out his mission.



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

One day I was out with my wife Sue walking my dog, Cody. Cody is the closest thing the Ferguson family has to a family secret. Google “Dave Ferguson,” and what you will not find are stories upon stories of my dog, Cody and me. There are a couple of reasons why. First, we have “shared custody” of Cody. Our friend Dale takes turns with us caring for the dog. This happened because Dale’s house was the first place where Cody stayed when we went out of town. And when Cody would visit, Dale would give him steak to eat, let Cody sleep with him on his bed, and completely spoil him. So when Cody came home to our house and did not get steak, and did not get to sleep with me...well, he was depressed! Seriously, after a visit with Dale he would come in our house and go straight to his bed and just sit there with a look on his face that said, “This place sucks!” So now we have shared custody. It’s weird.

But one afternoon, I’m out walking the dog with Sue, and our neighbor comes out. We have lived in the same neighborhood for the last eight years and I confess, I’ve made very little difference in my current neighborhood. So I started the missional practice of beginning each day with prayer. and I’ve begun to specifically pray everyday for people in my neighborhood.

One of our neighbors I’ve been praying for was recently very ill and went through a tough physical battle that lasted the better part of a year. So I’m out walking Cody and my neighbor meets me, and out of the blue we have a conversation.

Neighbor: “Hey Dave, I remember Sue saying you were going to write a book about ‘finding your way back to God’ did you ever write that book?”



Dave: “No, not yet. I’d like to someday; but why do you ask?”

Neighbor: I just kind of feel like that is what I need - to find my way back to God. Mostly, because of what I’m going through, 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. We could talk more about that.”

Neighbor: “We’d love that. It would be great to sit down and talk!”

I don’t know exactly what or how - but something changed when I started praying. I think God is at work in that story, and I can’t wait to see what happens next. What is emerging for me personally is a missional story, and it began with prayer.

A Prayer in the Mall

Now I have to warn you – if you begin everyday remembering that prayer is both how you do the mission and how you discover your mission it will be exciting, adventuresome and kind of dangerous. My experience is that if you pray and follow 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 prompting: “Go tell that guy God loves him.” Louie doesn’t want to do that. Would you want to 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. He doesn’t do it.

Later he comes out of a store in another part of the mall and there’s that same guy again, just sitting there on a different



bench this time. Again, Louie gets this 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 in the mall. He finally says, “Alright God!” And 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.” The guy’s eyes filled up with tears and he says, “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 walked up to me and said those very same words to me. No one’s ever said that to me before, and now it’s happened three times in one day!”

Get Started

Are you ready to discover your mission and begin changing your world? Let me give you these two specific challenges:

1. Commit to start every day with a prayer asking God to use you to bless some place or someone in your world. Be bold like my friend Dean and ask for a “divine appointment.”
2. In your small group ask each other the question every time you gather, “*Who did you B.L.E.S.S. this week?*” And if you are not yet in a group who encourages each other to be a part of the Jesus Mission, join one.

You can discover your mission, now! It starts with implementing the five missional practices of the B.L.E.S.S. strategy. And the first is “B” – Begin with Prayer. Don’t wait to get started. Stop what you are doing right now and ask God, “Use me to bless your world; make me a part of your mission; please use me to bless someone today.”



Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

1. Have you ever spent a significant time in prayer before making a big decision? How would you describe that experience?
2. What do you think it was like for Jesus to spend all night in prayer? What would it be like for you to pray all night?
3. What are some barriers that keep you from beginning each day with prayer? How can you overcome those barriers?

**B - Begin with Prayer****L - Listen**

E -

S -

S -

We live in a world where hardly anybody really listens. Most people are more interested in what they have to say than what someone else has to say. This reminds me of a famous quote on this topic: "The opposite of listening is not speaking, it's waiting to speak." Isn't that true? Do you ever find yourself in a conversation and you are looking at the person's lips moving, but you have no idea what they are saying because you are thinking about what you are going to say next? I've done it! Too many times I'm not really listening closely to people. I'm just cueing up my next words.

Or maybe you've been on the other side of that conversation. Have you ever felt like the other person in your conversation was not listening at all? We've all been part of conversations where the other person was saying "Yeah, yeah, uh-huh," but we knew they weren't really listening to anything that we were saying.

The second of our five simple missional practices (B.L.E.S.S.) is to "L" - Listen. Listening to our neighbors, family, friends, and even a stranger is one of the greatest gifts you can give someone. Being present and practicing the presence of Jesus in your listening may be as powerful as anything you ever say. Listening lays the relational foundation for any words



that we may choose to speak later. When we lay down our assumptions as to what people need and we learn to listen and ask the question “Where is God at work?” – then we discover our mission.

Jesus and the Blind Man

Here’s a story of what listening looked like in the life of Jesus:

“As he came near Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the road, begging. Hearing a multitude going by, he asked what this meant. They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. he cried out, ‘Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!’ Those who led the way rebuked him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, ‘You son of David, have mercy on me!’ Standing still, Jesus commanded him to be brought to him.” Luke 18:35-40 (WEB)

Now, let’s pause for a second in our story so we don’t miss anything. 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. Lots of people were on their way to Jerusalem on the same road as Jesus. Jericho was an extra-bustling place this time of year. Think New Year’s Eve at Times Square. 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 commotion 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 own 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:



"When he had come near, (Jesus) asked him, 'What do you want me to do?' He said, 'Lord, heal me, that I may see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight. Your faith has healed you.'" Luke 18:41,42 (WEB)

Now, you knew that was coming, right? Blind man can't see. The blind man calls out to Jesus, Jesus heals the blind man. The end. But not so fast: did you catch the question Jesus asks the blind man: "What do you want me to do?" Seems like a silly question, doesn't it? Maybe even unnecessary? It's not like Jesus couldn't tell the blind guy was blind.

So why does he ask the blind man what he wants him to do? Is this simply dramatic buildup for the subsequent miracle? I believe this story tells us something about Jesus beyond 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. Jesus listened.

"You never listen to me." Have you ever heard that before? We all know listening is critical in our closest personal relationships. But listening is also super-critical when it comes to living out the Jesus Mission. Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do?" I'm not suggesting we go around asking people that question at point-blank range; but I do think we need to be listening for what people would say if we did ask that question. The problem is we think the mission of Jesus will be accomplished by simply doing lots of nice and kind deeds for others. Not so. Before we ever do anything we must first listen!

We Need a Mailbox

Michael Frost is an author and church leader, and a friend of mine, who has spent much of his life 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, programs, and skilled workers ready to transform that village into a place of health and vitality. The missionaries went to the people living in slum-like conditions 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, or we could build a church so you can gather on weekends and learn about God. So what do you want us to do for you?” Sounds a lot like the question that Jesus asked, doesn’t it? And the people of the village said, “We need a mailbox.” The missionaries said, “A mailbox? We can give you a school, medical clinic or a church building and all you want is your own mailbox?” And the people said, “Yes, what we really need most is a mailbox.”

What these missionaries didn’t realize is that in India, if you live in a slum, you do not have a zip code, which means that you do not exist on a map. Even if you are a community of ten or twenty thousand people, if you don’t have a zip code, you are not recognized as existing and therefore not eligible for any social services from the government. The way they could get on the map and get a zip code was by having a mailbox. With a mailbox it would allow them access to all the services of their country’s 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 to receive a mailbox; but once they did, the village began to be restored.

That’s a magnificent principle, isn’t it? We must listen to people. We need to listen to our community. So, listen to your



workplace. Listen to your family. Listen to your classmates. Listen to the hurts, the needs, and the wounds of those that God has placed in your life. We must listen for what they really need.⁵

Listen to People

When I say, “listen to people,” I’m not talking about merely listening to the words that come out of their mouths. I mean listen for what’s really going on in their lives – understand where they are relationally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It’s kind of like in real estate. We’ve all heard the saying that the three most important words in real estate are “location, location, location.” That’s not just true about a piece of property; it’s true of people.

Dr. John Gottman is the leading researcher on why marriages succeed and fail. Dr. Gottman’s research has discovered that a key for happily married couples is that they know their spouse’s “map” or “location.” And conversely, those couples that are unhappy think they know their spouse’s “location”, but they don’t! And the difference is that those who are happily married consistently ask questions of their spouse such as: “What are you most excited about?” and “What are you most concerned about these days?” Bottom line: happily married couples listen to each other and know each other’s “location.”⁶

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 the people with whom we come into contact. We need to know their “location.” We need to ask them: “What do you need?” “What are you excited about?” “What matters most to you?” “What challenges are you facing?” “How can I help you?”



There's a story that's told from the very early years of Christianity about a monk who lived all alone out in the desert. It was there that he spent his time praying, meditating and studying the scriptures. A couple of times a year he would interrupt his prayer and study to come into town for supplies. When he would show up in town people would line up by the hundreds outside the hut where he was staying for the chance to talk with him. One man was tremendously curious about why people would stand in line for hours and sometimes days and what the monk would have to say that was so profound. His curiosity led him to get in line. He too waited for hours and hours for his turn to sit in front of this desert monk. When it was finally his turn, he sat down across from this holy man only to discover he said nothing. He had nothing profound to say. The desert monk would just sit there and listen. He simply listened. People in our world desperately want to be heard. The question is this - are we listening?

Listen to Places

We cannot bless the world without listening. We need to not only listen to people, but also listen to places. Here's what I mean. If we want to listen to our community or our city, I would encourage you or your small group to adopt a very simple exercise. Grab a local newspaper and a highlighter and read it from front to back. As you read it, highlight every need that you run across in that paper. Once you highlight every need, simply allow that to drive a conversation. Ask these questions:

- Which of these needs can we meet?
- In which of these needs are we particularly interested or about which needs are we especially passionate?

By reading the paper, we may discover an organization that needs volunteers. We may learn about a local event with which we can get involved. 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.

I mentioned Tammy Melchien in Chapter One who recently led the start of a new COMMUNITY campus in a Chicago neighborhood. One of the ways Tammy listens to the area she lives in is by showing up at community events. At a neighborhood block club meeting she listened and learned that there is a need to do a better job caring for the seniors in their community. It caused her to start dreaming about building volunteer teams to do senior wellness checks during severe weather. At a Chamber of Commerce meeting she listened and 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. She thought that maybe her campus could supply the volunteers? At forums hosted by the city alderman she listened and learned that the number one reason families move out of her neighborhood is the quality of the high schools. This got her thinking about how God could use her campus to come alongside these schools and make them even better.

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

Listen Daily

If you want to discover your mission, it starts with an intention to B.L.E.S.S. the world. That means you must first "B" - Begin with Prayer. Next, you will "L" - Listen. Listening to the people and the places where you live and work is a simple



Video:
Missional Story



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idea, but it will be harder to practice than you think. So let me challenge you in two ways:

1. When you pray ask God, “How do you want me to bless the world today? Help me to listen and discover the needs of others and where you are at work.” And then actually listen. Listen to your neighbors, friends, family and co-workers. Listen like Jesus listened.
2. When you get together as families, or in small groups, talk about what you are hearing: Describe what needs you are discovering through this simple missional practice of listening.

Jesus heard one man’s voice in a huge crowd of people, and asked, “What do you want Me to do?” Everyday we come into contact with people who nobody cares about and to whom nobody listens. 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, as we pray and listen.



Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What do you think is the biggest barrier to you truly listening to the people (and communities) in your life?
 - a. I'm too overwhelmed with my own stuff.
 - b. I'm afraid of what they might share.
 - c. I don't know the right questions to ask.
 - d. It's hard for me to care about what's going on with others.
 - e. Other (please explain)
2. Have you ever assumed you knew what someone needed, only to find out later that you were wrong? Share your story.
3. Why do you think it is so important for us to listen to people's (or our community's) needs before we begin serving?
4. What are some things we could be listening for as we hear from people we are trying to help find their way back to God?



Discover Your Mission Now

**B - Begin with Prayer****L - Listen****E - Eat****S -****S -**

Are you familiar with competitive eating? Yes, it's considered by many to be a real sport. And it's really gross! Every Fourth of July, ESPN shows the National Hot Dog Eating Championship at Coney Island. Joey Chestnut is the current reigning champion. He's won the last six 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 ten minutes. That's over 21,000 calories in ten minutes. Have you seen it? It's disgusting! But gross as it is, it's big business. Competitive eating is so big; we now have 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.

But this section isn't actually about competitive eating—it's about another particular kind of eating. If we are going to discover our mission, and truly reach, restore and reproduce the mission in others, then we need to be "blessers." First we "B - Begin" with Prayer, and then we "L" - Listen to the needs of those we are trying to reach and restore. And the third missional practice is brought to us by the letter "E", which stands for, yep, you guessed it: Eat.



Ever read a religious book about eating? Ever hear a sermon on eating? 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, resurrecting on the third day, right? But did you ever think that part of how Jesus saved the world was by eating?

Jesus Eats With Matthew

One of my favorite stories of Jesus eating with people comes from the Gospel of Matthew. It's actually about Matthew himself:

"As Jesus passed by from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection office. He said to him, 'Follow me.' He got up and followed him. As he sat in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'" Matthew 9:9-13 (WEB)

As you may already know, 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 bus load of lawyers drove off the side of a cliff, and the bad news is the bus had one empty seat?" Well, tax collectors were the butt of those kinds of jokes in Jesus' day. Tax collectors were local lackies for the Roman Empire, so right out of the gate, they are 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 Bernie Madoff look like Mr. Rogers. So when Jesus called one of the most despised and looked down upon people 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 Matthew’s 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. And to the leaders of the religious establishment, this was scandalous.

You see, eating in those days was central to life. But that’s not as true for us nowadays, is it? I’m not sure those of us who scarf down fast food while driving down the road are capable of grasping how central eating was to life back then. And it wasn’t just central in a physical sustenance way. Eating with someone was a statement that you wanted to be associated with that person. 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 great deal 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 (and I like to picture him saying this with a chicken leg in his hand), “It’s not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”



Jesus is not saying the Pharisees were healthy, good people who didn't need a doctor and the people he's eating with are messed-up. Jesus was saying that he was on mission with his life, and they (the Pharisees) didn't get it. 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, vulnerable and 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."

This dust-up between Jesus and the Pharisees over who Jesus ate with is not an isolated incident. Another time Jesus said to his critics among the religious establishment, "*The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard; a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'*" Luke 7:34-35 (WEB) 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 need to see in Jesus' life is that eating was not just something he did because people need to eat. Eating was integral to his mission of reaching and restoring the world. Jesus was a missional eater.

Missional Eating

For us to live out the Jesus Mission by blessing the world, it's all about forming relationships with people where we live and work that go beyond small talk and occasional conversation. One of the most effective ways for that to happen is to simply eat with people. Here's a favorite quote on this topic from Alan



Hirsch and Lance Ford's book, *Right Here Right Now*:

"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!"⁷

Change the world by eating? Got to love that! And I think they're right. Imagine what might happen if every Christ-follower reading this started regularly eating with our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends who don't know Jesus? If we are going to B.L.E.S.S. the world, we must eat with the world.

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

Now maybe you're reading this and thinking, "Well that sounds all well and good, Dave, but it's not that simple." We all have our "buts" about eating with others on a regular basis.

But I Don't Have Time

Here's one: "But I don't have time..." Many of us can barely find time to eat meals with our own families, let alone with someone else, right? I don't even want to know how many meals I eat in a hurry or in-between meetings every week. So I do get it—finding time to eat with people can seem like a practical impossibility. But what if this call from Jesus for missional eating is what finally gets us to a tipping point, where we realize we must 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 we cram into our already slammed schedules—it can actually become a part of the regular healthy rhythms of our lives. We need to be willing to shift our life to include those regular rhythms, like slowing down to eat.

But I Wouldn't Know What to Say

Another big “but”: “But I wouldn't know what to say” or “But I don't want to make anybody uncomfortable.” 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 very 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 I believe he will give us all the ability to do that. And part of how we bless the world is by going beyond surface relationships with people, and one of the best ways we can do that is by eating with them.

Now I realize there are all sorts of other potential “buts” about this idea of missional eating, so let me re-but:

“But I don't like to have people in my home” — Then eat out.

“But I can't cook” — Then order in.

“But I don't have time to clean up so the place is fit for guests or to fix something fancy enough for guests.” —Then get someone else to do it. Your roommate. Your kids. Your spouse. Become a missional eater!

Our teaching team leader, Tim Sutherland, was working on a talk on this subject, when something amazing happened to him. Here is his story, in his own words:

“A couple months ago I noticed an elderly man who would



consistently come into the cyber cafe at the Yellow Box to read some of the books we have on our shelves. After passing by him a few times, I felt this spiritual nudge to introduce myself and talk to him. So I did. I didn't tell him I was a pastor, I just told him my name and asked his name. He said his name was Shiva and he was here from India visiting his son. Over the next several days we had multiple conversations about what he was reading, and what it had to say to his Hindu beliefs.

Then, just this week I bumped into him again – this time at the counter of our Ground Level Café. He asked me, "What are you getting?" I told him, "A bagel and cream cheese." Then he pulls out his money, orders a Diet Coke and says, "I'm going back to India tomorrow, let me buy and we sit down together." So we sat down; me with my bagel and cream cheese and he with his Diet Coke. We talked about all sorts of stuff: his life back in India, his family, things we had in common and our differences. But here is what I noticed - that conversation that happened over a meal as basic as a bagel and cream cheese and Diet Coke felt significantly different than the other times we talked. We connected in a way we never had before.

When we got done he said to me, "May I give you something to remember me by?" I told him, "Sure." With that he stood and said, "I'll be back in ten minutes." He left and few minutes later came walking in with a work of art carved from a piece of wood. He held it out for me and said, "Please put this on your desk and remember me; remember Shiva." I don't know how to explain it, but eating with someone does something that nothing else does."

I know there are tons of reasons that can make eating together difficult and uncomfortable. But I believe it's totally worth pushing through our excuses and getting out of our comfort zones, 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



and 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 are going to find yourself helping others eat their way into the kingdom of God.

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 Tim sitting down over a bagel and cream cheese with Shiva will make any difference, but it feels great to know that somehow, someday, it might.

Remember—you don't have to do this alone. We encourage everyone in our church to get in a small group, because we believe to our core that we were never meant to pursue this mission solo. What if you joined a small group, and that group started having BBQ's or parties or dinners once a month inviting



We are not meant to pursue this mission solo. If you aren't in a small group, join one!

neighbors, co-workers, and friends? What if you skipped the Bible study, decided to just hang out, eat and party? That could be someone's first taste of your group, of this church, of God! You'll find that every missional practice of blessing the world will be easier, more fun, and more impactful when you do it in community with others.

So let's do it. Let's respond to his call on our lives to touch the lives of others through blessing the world—through prayer, through listening, and through eating. If every Christ follower



reading this implemented these missional practices on a regular basis, where we live and work will 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. Let's eat our way into the kingdom.



Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What do you think it meant to Matthew that Jesus was willing to come eat with him and his friends?
2. Which of these best describes your feelings about sharing meals with people? What do you think has contributed to you having these feelings?
 - a. I prefer to eat alone.
 - b. I don't mind eating with close friends or family, but I don't like sharing meals with people I don't know very well.
 - c. I love eating with anyone I can (co-workers, neighbors, new people), whether I know them well or not.
 - d. Other (please explain)
3. Why is it so important to build a relationship with people rather than just serve them or tell them about Jesus right away?
4. What are the biggest obstacles to you being able to share meals with the people you want to help find their way back to God? What are some ways you can overcome these obstacles?
 - a. I just don't have enough time.
 - b. It's uncomfortable for me.
 - c. I don't want to make them uncomfortable.
 - d. I can't cook and/or don't have the money to eat out.
 - e. I don't even know who I would invite to eat with me.
 - f. Other (please explain)

**B - Begin with Prayer****L - Listen****E - Eat****S - Serve****S -**

Last fall I began integrating the B.L.E.S.S. strategy into my own life. As lead pastor, I think it is important to 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 getting to know 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. We had a good time getting to know each other better. We've gone to Starbucks together and talked about some poignant spiritual topics. We had them over for dessert at Christmas time.

While we have been listening and eating together, we have been looking for ways to serve them. So, a while back 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 for whom I've been praying. Then this weird question came to mind - if I were to snow blow my neighbor's sidewalk using my other neighbor's snow blower, does that still count? Do I still get the credit for serving? Crazy!



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

Healing of the Deaf Man

“Again he departed from the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and came to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the region of Decapolis. They brought to him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside from the multitude, privately, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat, and touched his tongue. Looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!” Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was released, and he spoke clearly. He commanded them that they should tell no one, but the more he commanded them, so much the more widely they proclaimed it. They were astonished beyond measure” Mark 7:31-37 (WEB)

Proximity

The first notable quality of Jesus’s serving is proximity. Notice in scripture who Jesus served. Verse 32 says, *“They brought to him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They begged him to lay his hand on him.”* The people that Jesus served were always the people right in front of him, near him, those in close proximity. I’ve noticed in this journey of discovering our specific mission, many of us want something big, bold and grand! It’s like we are looking for something we can write a book about. (tongue firmly in cheek...) And when it’s suggested, *“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 we start—we start with the people near us, in front of us, in close proximity. Our mission is where ever our feet take us. We start with where we work; where we play; where we hangout; in our neighborhood. Those are the people we serve!



Now there are some exceptions. If you back up to the beginning of verse 31 it says, *“Again he departed from the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and came to the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the region of 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, we may not be in the place that God means for us to be.

For many of you, the only reason you are where you are is because the company you work for sent you there...not necessarily God. Maybe you only live where you live right now because it was a better or bigger house or apartment than the last one...probably not God. You might be where you are because of real estate values or because it's a better school district, or you got a promotion. Those are all good things; but it's entirely possible that God did not send you there. And for some of us, in order to discover our mission, God is going to relocate us so he can put us into closer proximity to the place and people he wants us to bless. He is going to send some of us to another city to plant a church; like Los Angeles, Seattle or Philadelphia. Some of us will be sent to a different country – perhaps Haiti or the Philippines. And some of us are going to get a spiritual transfer locally to under-resourced communities right in our own backyard.



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.

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 us! 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 this world and I can take you out” talk. That was not good! Today, if I see my wife, Sue, motioning to me with her index finger to pull me aside, I know that I’m in trouble. Again, not good!

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

The Bible says this guy was deaf and had a severe speech impediment. So, more than likely, he knows what it is like to be made of fun of, to be made to feel like a spectacle. 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*,⁸ 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 the train with their father at a subway stop. The children weren’t just loud, they were 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 anymore 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." Ouch! Covey used that story to remind us we need to "seek first to understand." We need to see first to understand the people God has put in close proximity to us: where we work; where we play; where we hangout; in our neighborhood - don't assume you know their story or their pain. Serve perceptively.

Personally

OK, consider that feeling you had at the end of Covey's story when you found out that the children's mother had died. Something inside of you most likely groaned, "Ohhhh." It hurt, didn't it? 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. Mark described Jesus as "Looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" In the original language this was not a sigh like we think of a sigh. It was a deep personal sort-of groan.

Yesterday, I received some really bad news about a close friend of our family and without even thinking my reaction was a groan of, "Ohhhh". Jesus is feeling for what this guy's been through. Jesus was not some serving machine who just cranked 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 my friend Alan Hirsch explain it this way: "Whoever we're called to serve, we need to feel their pain." Serving others is going to get personal. It needs to be.



Powerfully

Jesus served in close proximity. He also served perceptively and personally. And lastly, Jesus served powerfully. Don't just run past the big event of this story, thinking it doesn't apply to us. In Mark 7:34-35 it says, *"Looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphatha!' that is, 'Be opened!' Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was released, and he spoke clearly."* (WEB)

There is something I want us to learn from this story. In serving, Jesus used and accessed God's power; and we should too! We can be all fired up and motivated to discover our mission and serve the people around us. I love that! And when we think "S" - Serve, we think of doing good things: anything from shoveling a driveway to adopting a child. And those are great acts, big or small. But we should never forget that in our serving we have available to us the power of God. You might be thinking, "That was Jesus, of course he can do miracles; but not me." Really? Did you know that in John 14:12, Jesus told his followers, *"Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, he works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these..."* So let me remind you before we go any further, 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 are in a relationship that is hopeless, ask God to reconcile them.

You have access to a powerful God. Don't be afraid to ask him for a miracle!

Let me tell you about a friend of mine from COMMUNITY, his name is Adam, and he works in a local retail store. It is definitely not Adam's dream job, but he needed work, so he



took the job. Adam asked God to use him in that store to bless the people around him. And just as we have been encouraging, he began by praying for the people he worked with at the store.

After working there for a while he got to know his boss, Jeremy, and they quickly became friends. Jeremy made it clear he was not a Christ follower; but because of the growing friendship he willingly engaged in conversations about God, spirituality or “religion” as he called it. As Adam and Jeremy got to know each other better my friend learned that his boss was a single parent and that his son had chronic health problems; some really serious stuff. While on the store floor Adam noticed Jeremy seemed kind of down and he asked him, “Is something wrong?” Jeremy told him, “Yeah, it’s my son; he’s broken out in severe hives and the doctor can’t do anything about it. Since I can’t send him to school, he’s at home by himself and I’m really worried.” Adam wasn’t sure what his boss would say or think, but he asked, “Well, do you mind if I pray and ask God to heal him?” To Adam’s surprise, without even pausing Jeremy says, “Sure, go ahead! Please do!” Adam said, “I will.”

The store where they work is always busy and full of people, so Adam looked around for a quiet place to pray and ends up in the bathroom by himself. Adam simply prays, “God you know I love this guy and he’s hurting because of his son. I know what you can do, so please heal Jeremy’s son. Please take away his hives.” Having finished the prayer Adam headed back out to the sales floor. Literally, only moments later Adam sees his boss across the room with this astonished look on his face. Jeremy walks over to Adam and says to him, “That prayer thing? It really works! Your God must be real because my son just sent me a text 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! Never forget to access the power of God in your serving!



Discover Your Mission Now

A couple years ago I was in Stavanger, Norway working with a state-run Lutheran Pentecostal church. If you understand those terms then you know that they all contradict each other! But this was an amazing church and they did something I will never forget. On the weekends, this church would set up a tent in the town square with a banner above that simply said, "Healing Prayer." During the busiest time of the week in the center of town a few of them would hang out offering free coffee, refreshments and prayer for anyone that wanted it.



Video:
Missional Story



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It was amazing to see people who never stepped foot in a church building stop and ask for prayer. And when they did, my Lutheran Pentecostal friends would put a hand on their shoulder and ask for God's power to work in that person's life. No weird stuff. Just praying. And what the pastor of that church told me about the results of praying in the town square completely shocked me. He said, "Dave, 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 in the town square, sometimes it is more than 80%!" I don't even know what to make of those statistics. But I do know this - there is a power available to us and we need to use it in our serving as we bless the world and help people find their way back to God!



Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. When was a time that someone truly served you? How did that affect you? What did it do to your relationship?

2. When was a time that you served someone? How did that affect you? What did it do to your relationship with them?

3. What most often keeps you from serving people?

4. How do you think God may be calling you to serve someone? What is one step you can take toward obeying God and serving that person?



Discover Your Mission Now

**B - Begin with Prayer****L - Listen****E - Eat****S - Serve****S - Story**

It is likely that you've heard a version of this quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi at some point in your journey: "Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words." Sound familiar? Read the previous quote from St. Francis two more times slowly because we will come back to it.

As Christ followers we're on the Jesus Mission of reaching people who are far from God, restoring our world to how it was meant to be and reproducing the mission in others. The acronym B.L.E.S.S. lays out the missional practices we can all do each day to carry out the Jesus Mission where we live and work.

Let's review the previous chapters just for good measure.

- **"B" - Begin with prayer.** We need to pray and ask God, "How do you want me to bless the world for you today?"
- **"L" - Listen.** We are to be people who listen and are truly interested in the struggles, pains and challenges in the lives of people where we live and work.



- **“E” - Eat.** To build genuine relationships that bless the world, we need to share a meal with the people we’re praying for and to whom we are listening.
- **“S” - Serve.** As we build relationships through listening and eating with others we will know how we can love them. In response to that we choose to meet others’ needs in practical and impactful acts of service.
- **“S” - Story.** We are called to share the story of God; the story of how we have found our way back to God through Jesus.

If or When?

I don’t think I’d be going out on a limb to say that for most of us, of the five missional practices in B.L.E.S.S., this last one is the most challenging. That’s why I mentioned that quote from St. Francis. There’s another version of it out there that says “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.” It’s just one word that changed, but that one word makes a big difference. “If” means a person might never actually have to talk to anybody about God. To have a conversation about God with one of my friends, neighbors or co-workers can be very intimidating. In those cases, “If” is an appealing alternative, leaving the possibility that I won’t actually have to share the story with words. So the difference between “if” and “when” is significant. The original quote was “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words.” It was a reminder from St. Francis that the gospel is always proclaimed in word and deed. And besides that, you can’t spell “BLESS” with just one “S”.

Jesus and Nicodemus

Jesus lived out each of the B.L.E.S.S. missional practices including this last one of telling his story through spoken



words. Here's a great example from the Bible about how Jesus shared his story with somebody, one on one. *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to him by night.*" John 3:1-2 (WEB) Before we go any further, let me give you the backstory. The Pharisees were a very conservative, very educated, very influential group of religious leaders in Jesus' day. And the Pharisees butted heads with Jesus often. They were anti-Jesus all the way, which is why Nicodemus comes to talk with Jesus at night. Nicodemus is keeping his interest in Jesus on the "down-low." The Bible says, *"The same came to him by night, and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.' Jesus answered him, 'Most certainly, I tell you, unless one is born from above, he can't see God's Kingdom.'"* John 3:2-3 (WEB)

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; it's very nice of you to say that." Jesus takes the conversation in a very personal direction. He tells Nicodemus he needs to be "born from above." This was very difficult for Nicodemus because he had always been taught that everything was fine between him and God since he was an Israelite by birth and lived by certain religious rules. But then Jesus challenges his thinking and says, "You must be born from above."

Nicodemus is curious; so he asks Jesus:

"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom! That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don't marvel that I said to you, You must be born from above. The wind blows where it wants



to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus answered him, 'How can these things be?'" John 3:4-9 (WEB)

When Nicodemus asks, "How can this be?" he's genuinely intrigued by what he is hearing. Jesus is turning his whole world upside down about what it means to find God:

"Jesus answered him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things? Most certainly I tell you, we speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen, and you don't receive our witness. If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.'" John 3:10-13 (WEB)

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; he continues this eternity-altering conversation with Nicodemus:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him." John 3:14-17 (WEB)

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. Then Jesus says to Nicodemus what has become the most quoted verse in all the Bible, John 3:16: *"For God so loved the*



world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (WEB)

What just happened? Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the middle of the night with red-hot spiritual interest. The question is not “if” Nicodemus is interested. It’s obvious now is the “when.” So Jesus knew this was a time when it was necessary to use words. He shares the story of who he is, 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 B.L.E.S.S.—Story. When necessary share the story.

“When” Not “If”

Now back to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.” I think we tend to prefer the “if” 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, if I wear my Christian t-shirt, or if I have a ‘Jesus fish’ on my car, then I don’t have to ever really talk to anybody about God. They will just know I’m a Christ follower and it will be obvious how they can be one too.”

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. Of course, we need to be wise and sensitive in what we say and how we say it, but when we get the chance, we need to take it. You 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. The Bible is clear about this:



"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in him whom they have not heard?" Romans 10:14 (WEB)

Could you imagine a hunger relief organization saying: "Feed the hungry: if necessary, use food?" Or what if a medical missionary said: "Care for the sick, if necessary use medicine?" Or think about how ridiculous it would be if a comedian said: "Make people laugh, if necessary use jokes?"

"...when necessary, use words." was originally meant to encourage people to have their walk match their talk. But the problem is most of us don't want to talk to anyone about God or Jesus. I think we get so concerned about not coming across as some kind of fanatic that we are silent about the best news and the greatest story we could ever have the privilege of sharing. Ponder this question: are you more concerned about what people think of you, than whether or not they find their way back to God?

A friend of mine, Jen, used to be a self-described atheist. She felt you must be simple-minded and uninformed to believe in Jesus. Today she's a committed Christ follower, but if you asked her how she found her way back to God, 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 is how a close friend told her the story of how Jesus radically changed her life. Jen said she didn't know what to do with that. It just kind of sat there inside of her, tugging at her. She would say that her friend's story lived in her heart and mind for years. And when Jen 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 often that time comes when we’ve developed a relationship with someone through prayer, listening, eating together and serving. Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus, and no, we’re obviously not Jesus, but there will be something about your life that will be intriguing or attractive, that will keep tugging at people, and words will be necessary. That is why the Bible tells us: *“But set aside the Lord God in your hearts; and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear: having a good conscience; that, while you are spoken against as evildoers, they may be disappointed who curse your good way of life in Christ.”* 1 Peter 3:15-16 (WEB)

Share the Story

When it comes to sharing the story with words, here is a basic outline that’s pretty easy to remember.

- **Before:** *My story before I committed my life to following Jesus.* Tell what was missing in your life.
- **During:** *My story of how I made a commitment to following Jesus.* Tell how you made that commitment and what you did.
- **After:** *My story after I made a commitment to following Jesus.* Tell about the difference that following Jesus has made in your life and eternity.

Before, during, and after. Just tell your story. You don’t have to have a dramatic 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.” Peter says, set Christ apart as Lord in your heart. When you set Christ apart in your heart, it makes you different. You have experienced grace. You know what it is like to be forgiven. You know what it means to have a purpose in this life. You have a hope that goes



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Jesus changes our lives and our eternity. So whenever you get the chance, share the story. Share your story. Just remember: before, during and after. Start with how things used to be before you found your way back to God. Then talk about what it was like when you found your way back to him. And lastly, describe how things are different with Jesus in your life since you decided to follow him. Your life does not have to be all rainbows and cupcakes afterward. Just keep it real and tell your story. It will help people find their way back to God.

Before we finish I want you to take a moment and reflect on a truth of tremendous importance: If you met Jesus and it didn't really change you, it wasn't Jesus you met. If you call yourself a Christ follower and following Christ hasn't really changed you, I don't know whom you are following, but it's not Jesus. At the very least, finding your way back to God in Jesus means you no longer put any hope in religious activity, or personal morality for your eternity; your only hope is in God's Son, Jesus. Your hope is in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Before you are ready to B.L.E.S.S. others by sharing your story do some soul searching about whether or not you've really "set aside Christ as Lord in your heart." Have you set Christ Jesus as the Lord and leader of your life? If you have done that, you will have a story.

Nicodemus was forever changed after his late night encounter and hearing Jesus's story. In that moment he not only found forgiveness and a hope for eternity, Nicodemus discovered



his mission. 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 a martyr for refusing to deny his belief in Jesus.

Nicodemus heard the story of Jesus and was changed forever.



Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What would you say is the greatest barrier you face in sharing your story of finding your way back to God? How do you need to rely more upon God's Spirit when the opportunity to share your story emerges?
2. How you would put into your own words what Jesus said to Nicodemus in regards to being born from above? (no churchy words allowed)
3. Who first shared the Gospel story with you? What was it about how they shared the story that was so compelling to you?
4. How are you allowing the reality of Jesus to change your life? How is God challenging you to share your story with others about how Jesus is real in your life?



It was the second semester of my freshman year at college when I discovered my life's mission. I was called to "help people find their way back to God." And nothing in my life has been the same since! Yes, there are still some days I wake up with a "have-to-do" list – that is a just part of this life. But since the discovery of my own mission I wake up everyday knowing there is something "*I have to do!*" Knowing the mission that Jesus has for my life brings purpose, meaning and a fulfillment like I've never known. And the reason I wrote this book is because I want that for you too!

Congratulations on finishing this book! I'm really excited for you because you should be well on your way to discovering the mission that God has for you. However, it is possible to read this book and not discover your God-given mission. Let me explain, there are two groups of people that will have read this book.

Group #1: Read and Regret

The first group are those that read this book, get started on the journey of discovering their life mission but after a few weeks quit applying everything they've learned. They forget the specifics of the Jesus Mission and they quit living out the missional practices Jesus taught us. Within weeks they start feeling a lack of meaning, purposelessness and the same emptiness they had when they first started reading this book comes creeping back into their life. This group of people will read the book and ultimately walk away with regrets. I don't want that to be you!



Group #2: Read & Repeat

There is also a second group that will have read this book and began implementing the missional practices of Jesus, but then kept on repeating those behaviors. There are two disciplines that they integrate into their life:

1. Daily: Do one of the five missional practices everyday. These practices are both how you do the mission and how you discover your own God-given mission.
2. Weekly: In your small group ask each other, “Who did you B.L.E.S.S. this week?” If we are left on our own we will drift away from our mission. Make sure you have people around you who help you re-focus on living out your mission.

If you will integrate those two disciplines into your life you will be in the second group that discovers that God is at work in this world and he has a “good work” (Ephesians 2:10) for you to do. “This group of people will discover a mission and know the thrill of waking up every day with something, “*I have to do!*”

Your Partner on the Jesus Mission,

Dave Ferguson
Lead Pastor,
Community Christian Church



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You were born with a God-given mission for your life.

Through each person that God brings into this world he also gives birth to a mission. It is knowing and living out your God-given mission that brings purpose, meaning and a fulfilling way to make a difference with your days. Exciting stuff, huh? And here is the good news – you are about to discover your mission in the pages of this book!

In *Discover Your Mission Now*, Dave Ferguson and the Community Christian crew articulate an innovative way to get the whole church engaged in mission in every possible context and in ways that fit seamlessly into the lives of ordinary people. Pure magic!

—**Alan Hirsch**, Award winning author on missional Christianity including *Untamed* and *Right Here, Right Now*.

What Dave has done in *Discover Your Mission Now* is provide a simple but powerful process that helps us all gain a deeper understanding of our mission and the handles for how we can live it out. This is a fantastic book!

—**Mike Breen**, 3DM Founder / Global Team Leader

Serving others is an integral part of being a follower of Christ, but finding your sweet spot and mission in life can make all the difference. *Discover Your Mission Now* will help you discover your passion and motivate you to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a hurting world.

—**Craig Groeschel**, Senior Pastor of LifeChurch.tv
Author of *Soul Detox*, *Clean Living in a Contaminated World*



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