

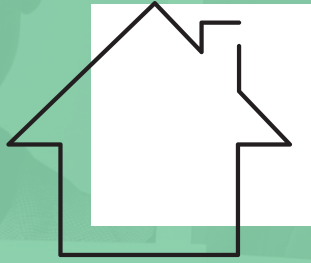
B.L.E.S.S.

5 SIMPLE WAYS TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Small Group Study Guide

OCTOBER 2021

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
CUMMING, GEORGIA



HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

We're about to embark on a five-week journey that will help us develop a lifestyle that can bless others who do not know Jesus.

We strongly believe that God has the power to radically transform lives, and the way He has chosen to do that is through His people—us!

We'll be using the acronym **BLESS** to create habits in our lives to reach out to our neighbors and other people God has placed near us. **BLESS** is an intentional pathway for followers of Jesus to become more like Jesus and join the mission of Jesus.

B.L.E.S.S stands for:



Be in prayer

Jesus and others have blessed you through prayer. We can bless others who don't know Jesus yet by praying for them.

Listen with care

Jesus and others have listened to your questions, concerns, and fears. We can bless others who are far from God by listening to them with care and compassion.

Eat with others

Jesus and others have accepted you and invited you to fellowship with them. Let us accept and invite others who don't know Jesus yet to fellowship with us at our table.

Serve in love

Jesus and others have served you in ways that impacted you. We can serve others who do not know God in ways that can impact them.

Share your story

Jesus and others have shared their story with you in ways that have changed you. We can share our story with others so that they may know the life-changing power of Jesus.

Whether the group you're meeting with has been together for several years or is just starting out, the discussion provided within these pages can help you begin to discover how we can all be part of loving our neighbors and changing our world. As you commit to spending time together on this journey of learning and discovery, here are some other helpful pieces to consider:



B.L.E.S.S.

SERMONS

Sermons can be found at www.fbccumming.org/bless

WEEKLY SOCIAL MEDIA REMINDERS

To help keep the **BLESS** practices a part of our lives, we've created weekly ideas that we'll share on our church's Facebook and Instagram pages.

WEEKLY MISSION OPPORTUNITIES

It's important to practice the **BLESS** habits personally AND with your church. Each week, there is a "Moving Out with Your Church" section. Visit www.fbccumming.org/bless for mission opportunities with your church to practice the **BLESS** habits together.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit www.fbccumming.org/bless for additional resources including practical tips, articles, podcasts, and books to help you dive even deeper into the **BLESS** habits.

We are the church existing for the world. And it's important to remember that the Holy Spirit is central to this work. Effective witness is only made possible through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Our mission, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, is to equip followers of Christ for God's mission and walk with each other along the way.¹

Let's begin our journey together!

¹ Much of this curriculum is adapted from the BLESS Small Group Guide from Constance Free Church <https://s3.amazonaws.com/constance/Bless/BLESS+Small+Group+Guide.pdf> and Blessed to Bless by Beth Seversen and Rick Richardson https://covchurch.org/evangelism/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2018/01/BLESS_Small-Group-Study-Guide_download.pdf

WEEK 1 - "B" BE IN PRAYER

In Genesis, God called Abraham and made him a promise: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great so that you will be a blessing" (12:2). In this text, we see that **God's desire is to bless us**. However, it doesn't end there. **God's desire is also that we be a blessing to others**. The question we must ask is: How can we do that?

BLESS consists of five mission habits that help us understand how we can bless others in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and wherever we go in the world. This week, we start with habit #1: **BE in prayer**.

When we hear the word *cultivate*, a certain agricultural picture may come to mind. You might think of soil being prepared, turned over and broken loose so that it is ready to receive a seed and foster the growth of new crops. Hearts can be cultivated in the same way, and prayer is the means by which this happens.

As we pray, our own hearts are cultivated and God prepares us to see opportunities to join Him in helping people connect with Jesus. As he brings about this awareness in us, He will also begin to equip us to do this work. We begin to see our opportunities and abilities grow as we pray that God would use us.

As we pray, the hearts of others are also cultivated. We are brought into the much larger work that the Holy Spirit is doing in people's hearts and lives. We can witness hearts softened and minds opened to receive the good news of Jesus Christ.

SHARE

As your group begins this journey together, share what you hope God teaches you over the next 5 weeks as you focus on how to bless the people God has put in your life.

PRAYER

Spend some time as a group praying God would begin to help you identify a few people who do not have a relationship with Jesus. Pray that He will show you opportunities and give you the ability to bless these people. Pray that their hearts would be open to transformation through Jesus.

WATCH

Colossians 4:2-4 (NIV)

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

DISCUSS

- 1 What's one key thought or insight from the video teaching that impacted you? Why?
- 2 These verses were part of a letter Paul wrote to the church in Colossae while imprisoned. If you were in prison, what do you think you'd be asking for in prayer? As a person facing extreme hardships, are you surprised by how Paul is encouraging his readers to pray?
- 3 What are some characteristics of a person who is devoted to something? What does it look like to be devoted to prayer?
- 4 What did Paul mean by asking that he be able to proclaim his message clearly?
- 5 Why did Paul pray for God to "open a door" for his message? Why is it important for us to pray for open doors to share Jesus with others?
- 6 Why do you think being in prayer is the first of the BLESS habits?
- 7 Why do you think it is so difficult for us to devote ourselves to prayer? Are there any misconceptions we have about prayer that contribute to lack of devotion?
- 8 What are some of the barriers that might come up as you begin praying regularly for people near you? How can we, as a group, support each other as we begin "being in prayer" for these individuals?



MOVING OUT PERSONALLY

Take some time to think about the people in your “Circles of Life” who do not know Jesus. Ask God to bring to mind 3 to 5 people to pray for daily. Write their names below:

The diagram consists of four overlapping circles arranged in a cross pattern. The top circle is labeled "Family" and contains two horizontal lines. The left circle is labeled "Neighbors" and contains three horizontal lines. The right circle is labeled "Friends" and contains two horizontal lines. The bottom circle is labeled "Co-workers" and contains three horizontal lines.

Here are some ways you can pray for these individuals: (Insert the person’s name that you’re praying for in the blank)

- Pray for _____ to become thirsty for God. (John 7:37-39)
- Pray for _____ to become open to change. (2 Corinthians 7:10)
- Pray for _____ to clearly experience God’s love. (1 John 4:7-10, 19-21)
- Pray for _____ to develop deep spiritual rootedness in Christ. (John 15:5; Colossians 2:6-7)

Just as we are praying for others, here are some ways we can be in prayer for ourselves:

- Pray that you would trust in the Lord and not try to bless others through your own strength. (Proverbs 3:5)
- Pray that God would open a door for the message to be heard. (Colossians 2:3)
- Pray that God would provide opportunities to speak boldly. (Acts 28:31)

MOVING OUT WITH YOUR CHURCH

Take a prayer walk with others from your church this week. Opportunities are listed at www.fbccumming.org/bless

WEEK 2 - "L" LISTEN WITH CARE

The five mission habits of BLESS—natural things we do every day—help us bless people who do not yet know Jesus. This week we are focusing on habit #2: **LISTEN with care.**

Listening with care means we don't just hear the words someone is saying to us. We are active listeners who begin to understand the needs of people, the past that has shaped their present, and how we might be able to bring the hope of Jesus into their lives. Listening with care requires more than just a listening ear—although that is very important. It also requires a heart that is open to using these conversations to be a blessing to others.

SHARE

If you haven't done so already, share with the group who is on your prayer list. What intentional actions have helped you to "be in prayer" for these people?

PRAYER

Whether your group chooses to begin your time in prayer or close in prayer, spend time praying over the conversations that are taking place with those you are seeking to bless. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you opportunities to listen as well as speak into people's lives.

WATCH

Luke 18:35-43 (NIV)

35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." 38 He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39 Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, 41 "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. 42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.



VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

DISCUSS

- 1 What's one key thought or insight from the video teaching that impacted you? Why?
- 2 What impresses you most about Jesus's interaction with the man who was blind? How would you have felt if you were that man?
- 3 When was the last time you truly felt listened to, known, and loved? What was so special about that experience?
- 4 What are the attitudes that keep us from being good listeners? Which of the following reasons contribute the most to us being poor listeners?
 - Too busy to give undivided attention.
 - More concerned about what we have to say than what others have to say.
 - Not really caring about the other person, but only how their "stuff" intersects with ours.
 - Distracted by our phone.
 - Pre-judging what someone is going to say.
 - Being so steeped in our own ideological point of view that we are no longer curious about the stories and experiences of others different from us.
 - Thinking we can multi-task while listening.
- 5 What are some questions that we could use to draw out stories from someone, especially as it relates to their spiritual journey?

MOVING OUT PERSONALLY

Spend some time thinking through your week. Are there any places in your schedule that can be made available to “listen with care”? Here are some ideas and space to add more of your own:

- Take a walk around your neighborhood with the intention of striking up a conversation if the opportunity presents itself.
- If you find yourself waiting for an appointment, standing in line at the store, or on the sidelines of a sporting event, resist the urge to pull out your phone. Instead, seek opportunities to engage with the people around you.
- If you are feeling inconvenienced by a neighbor, family member, friend, or stranger, ask God to show you how to take time to “listen with care.”

- _____

- _____

MOVING OUT WITH YOUR CHURCH

Listening is an important habit to practice when we meet people from other faiths. Over the next few weeks, go with your church to fellowship with people from other faiths, getting to know their stories and learning about what they believe. You, your family, or small group can sign-up for a Friendship Gathering here: www.fbccumming.org/bless



WEEK 3 - "E" EAT WITH OTHERS

This week we are focusing on habit #3: **EAT with others**. When we sit around a table and share a meal with others, we have the opportunity to move a relationship from acquaintance toward friendship. The table can be a great equalizer. Everyone has a place and an opportunity to be heard and known during a fellowship with food. Eating together provides an opportunity to develop relational bridges, discover people's stories, and discern the next steps in helping them connect with Jesus.

SHARE

How well did you "listen with care" this week? Was there a specific moment when you were able to set aside distractions and listen to someone else's story? Share the details of this encounter with the group.

PRAYER

Whether your group chooses to begin your time in prayer or close in prayer, spend time praying over the meals or coffees that will be shared with people who need to hear the good news of Jesus. Pray that compassionate conversation would occur and that people would feel heard, known, loved, and accepted.

WATCH

Matthew 9:9-13 (NIV)

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. 10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."



VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

DISCUSS

- 1 What's one key thought or insight from the video teaching that impacted you? Why?
- 2 Tax collectors were despised in the Jewish community, and for good reason! They often collected more money than was required from Rome and became very wealthy because of it. What did Jesus see in these individuals that others did not? Why did he choose to associate with them?
- 3 Why do you think Matthew felt the need to throw a party with Jesus as the invited guest? Wouldn't you think he would have set up a lecture hall for his friends to listen to Jesus? What is so important about this relational component leading the way?
- 4 Jesus faced criticism for eating with tax collectors and other "undesirable" individuals. What can we learn from his response in verses 12-13? How can this response compel us to reach out to and spend time with those that are far away from Jesus?
- 5 Jesus was obviously able to associate with sinners without sinning. What needs to be in place in our own lives so that we can do the same?
- 6 How can the BLESS habits we have discussed so far be brought into "eating together"? How could they deepen the time spent together over a meal or coffee?
- 7 What do you see as some of the challenges to the practice of "eating together"? Are there any hesitations you're feeling about this practice?



MOVING OUT PERSONALLY

- 1 Pray that God would provide opportunities to share a meal, coffee, or dessert with the people on your prayer list. Pray that He would equip you to develop relational bridges through the habit of eating together.
- 2 Eat with someone this week! What are some ways you can do it? Here are a few ideas:
 - Invite a neighbor or friend over for dinner.
 - Ask a colleague out for lunch.
 - Ask a friend you are praying for to go out for coffee.
 - Buy ingredients for ice cream sundaes and invite neighbors over for an ice cream party.
 - As the holidays draw near, think of someone you could invite to your family celebrations.
 - Organize a block party or neighborhood gathering.

 - Other ideas:

MOVING OUT WITH YOUR CHURCH

As mentioned last week, go with your church to fellowship with people from other faiths, getting to know their stories and learning about what they believe. You, your family, or small group can sign-up for a Friendship Gathering here: www.fbccumming.org/bless

WEEK 4 - "S" SERVE IN LOVE

Mission habit #4 is **SERVE in love**. When we serve others in love, we build bridges and provide opportunities for people to meet Jesus. We are helping remove barriers and obstacles so that they can experience His love, forgiveness, and healing first-hand.

SHARE

Did you have the opportunity to eat with someone you have been praying for this week? How did it go? In what ways was your relationship deepened?

PRAYER

As a group, spend time praying that the Holy Spirit would reveal ways that you can serve people in love. Also, pray you would seek out these opportunities and be willing to serve even when it might put you outside of our comfort zones.

WATCH

Mark 2:1-5 (NIV)

1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

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VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

DISCUSS

- 1 What's one key thought or insight from the video teaching that impacted you? Why?
- 2 Just like the four friends who overcame obstacles and took a risk to bring their friend to Jesus, other people have made sacrifices to serve you in love so you could follow Jesus. What sacrifices have others made to serve you in love so you could follow Jesus?
- 3 There are numerous examples in the Bible of people (including Jesus) blessing others by serving in love. Choose one or two of these passages to read as a group. As you read these verses, why is it so important that we serve others in love?
 - Jesus Heals Many (Mark 1:32-34)
 - A Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)
 - Jesus Raises a Dead Girl (Matthew 9:18-19)
 - A Demon-Possessed Man (Matthew 9:32-33)
 - The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- 4 In our current culture, what perceptions do people have about Christians? How can our serving in love impact the perceptions people have of Christians? How can it impact the perceptions of the people on our prayer list?
- 5 What are some of the hesitations or barriers we may have when it comes to serving others in love? In what ways can we overcome these barriers?



MOVING OUT PERSONALLY

There are so many ways that we can serve others in love. Take some time with your group to share some practical ways that you can serve the people on your prayer list. Record your ideas below.

MOVING OUT WITH YOUR CHURCH

Serve others with one of your church's mission partners over the next few weeks. Go to www.fbccumming.org/bless and sign-up to serve in love! Your group can also contact one of your church's mission partners directly and discover ways you can serve with them. Go to www.fbccumming.org/bless to learn how you can support and serve your church's mission partners.

FOR NEXT WEEK: Go to www.firstbaptistcumming.org/stories. Take time to read a few stories or watch a few videos of people's stories and be ready to discuss one or two that stuck out to you.

WEEK 5 - "S" SHARE YOUR STORY

The final mission habit of BLESS is: **SHARE your story**. Stories hold a lot of power. They have the power to change opinions, create empathy, provide clarity, and bring transformation. Our personal stories are unique and essential and can help others understand how Jesus impacts lives in real and tangible ways. Through stories, people can begin to believe that change is possible and hope is personal. They can start to understand what love looks like and that true, lasting, selfless love can be theirs to experience through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

SHARE

- 1 Did you have an opportunity to serve someone from your prayer list in love? What did you do? How did it go?
- 2 Did you have an opportunity to serve with others from your church? What did you do? How did it go?
- 3 As we begin talking about the importance of story, think back to some of the stories you read or watched this week. Which one did you find most impactful? Why?

PRAYER

As a group, spend some time praying that God would show you opportunities to bless others by sharing your story about how Jesus changed your life. Pray for boldness as you take this step of faith.

WATCH

John 9:1-11, 25, 35-38 (NIV)

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" **3** "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4** As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. **5** While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." **6** After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **7** "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. **8** His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" **9** Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." **10** "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. **11** He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

25 "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" **37** Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." **38** Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

DISCUSS

- 1** What's one key thought or insight from the video teaching that impacted you? Why?
- 2** How would you have felt if you were the man who was blind since birth and suddenly could see? How would you explain what happened?
- 3** What is your reaction to the simplicity of his story, "I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25)?
- 4** What might keep Christ-followers from sharing their story? How might Christ-followers remove these barriers in order to share their story boldly and regularly?
- 5** Read 1 Peter 3:15 below. How would you respond if someone asked you, "How do you have hope?"

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.



MOVING OUT PERSONALLY

Your 15-second story: The 15-second testimony is very easy to learn and minimizes the stress of bridging to the gospel. It also leaves much unsaid, inviting conversation with people who are far from God. In your small group, have breakout groups of 3-4 and practice sharing your stories with each other. Here's a basic outline:

- Think of **TWO WORDS** that describe your life before you met Jesus.
- Think of **TWO WORDS** that describe how Jesus changed your life.

Here's an example:

"There was a time in my life when I was (insecure) and (angry). Then I surrendered my life to Jesus and made Him the Leader of my life. Now I am (secure) and (full of joy). Do you have a story like this?"

That last question is very important, as it invites the other person to share their own experience. When you practice this method in a group, use that last phrase to pass it along to someone else in the group to practice it.

Now that you've practiced sharing your story with others in your small group, you're ready to go share this 15-second story with someone who is not yet a follower of Jesus!

MOVING OUT WITH YOUR CHURCH

Serving and sharing go together. Serving others often opens the door to share your story with others. Serve others with one of your church's mission partners sometime in the next few weeks. As you serve, be ready to share your story! Go to www.fbccumming.org/bless and sign-up to serve in love and share your story!

In the months to come, it will be important for your group to support and serve your church's mission partners as you continue to practice these BLESS habits together. Go to www.fbccumming.org/bless to learn more.

HOW TO SUPPORT AND SERVE YOUR CHURCH'S MISSION PARTNERS

There are several ways that you and your family can get involved. View the calendar below to see different ways you can BLESS your neighbor. Please visit www.fbccumming.org/blessopportunities to view the list online.

PLEASE REGISTER FOR ANY SERVE OPPORTUNITY AT FBCCUMMING.ORG/EVENTS

BE IN PRAYER

October 3 - Prayer Walk for Community, Neighborhoods & Schools at 5:00 PM.

LISTEN/EAT (FRIENDSHIP GATHERINGS)

October 16 - Friends of India Friendship Gathering - 4:00 PM at FBC.

October 23 - Multicultural Friendship Gathering - 5:00 PM at FBC.

October 24 - Friendship Gathering with our Muslim Neighbors - 5:00 PM at FBC.

SERVE/SHARE (SERVE AND SHARE OPPORTUNITIES)

October 30 - Fall Festival at FBC

October 31 - Halloween! Bless your neighbors by engaging your neighbors as they come to your doorstep!

October 31 - Share your story on video at FBC.

November 1, 2, 3, 4 - Bless our Hindu Neighbors (Week of Diwali)

November 14 - Orphan Ministry Info Gathering

December 4 - Christmas Caroling in Neighborhoods

December 10 -12 - Family Mission Trip to Lynch, KY

December 11 - Christmas Caroling in Neighborhoods

December 18 - Christmas Caroling in Neighborhoods

January 1 - 8 - Mission Trip to London, UK

WHERE CAN I FIND RESOURCES FOR BLESS?

Visit www.fbccumming.org/blessresources to view resources for BLESS.



