**How to BLESS Your Neighbor – Week 2 – Begin with Prayer**

**Message Big Idea**: In order to BLESS our neighbor, Jesus invites us to begin with prayer.

**Scripture:** Luke 6:12-16

Is there a handout piece?

**Introduction: Beth Moore Hairbrush Story**

*(Series Graphic)* Crazy things happen when we pray.

I’d like to begin today by telling you a story. It’s a story about popular author and gifted Bible teacher *(picture)* Beth Moore.

As Beth tells it, one morning she was sitting in an airport, Bible open on her lap, enjoying some time reading and praying before her scheduled flight. As she sat enjoying this moment, she glanced up and noticed an old man sitting in a wheel chair. He was abnormally thin, slumped over, but the strangest thing about him was his hair. Stringy, tangled hair hung well over his shoulders and down part of his back.

Beth tried to stop staring, but something in her began to stir with emotion for this bizarre-looking old man. In Beth’s words:

*“I had walked with God long enough to see the handwriting on the wall. I've learned that when I begin to feel what God feels, something so contrary to my natural feelings, something dramatic is bound to happen. I immediately began to resist. I started arguing with God in my mind. ‘Oh no, God please no…Don't make me witness to this man.’*

*Then I heard it...’I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to brush his hair.’*

*The words were so clear, my heart leapt into my throat, and my thoughts spun like a top.”*

After several agonizing moments trying to reason with God that this prompting was ridiculous, a red-faced, tentative Beth Moore approached the old man and knelt down before him.

*"’May I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?’*

*To which he responded in volume ten, ‘Little lady, if you expect me to hear you, you're going to have to talk louder than that.’*

*At this point, I took a deep breath and blurted out, ‘SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF BRUSHING YOUR HAIR?’ At which point every eye in the place darted right at me.*

*I watched him look up at me with absolute shock on his face, and say, ‘If you really want to.’ Are you kidding? Of course I didn't want to. But God didn't seem interested in my personal preference right about then. ‘Yes, sir, I would be pleased. But I have one little problem. I don't have a hairbrush.’*

*‘I have one in my bag,’ he responded.*

*I went around to the back of that wheelchair, and I got on my hands and knees and unzipped the stranger's old carry-on hardly believing what I was doing. I stood up and started brushing the old man's hair.*

*Need one other place to come out of this.*

*It was perfectly clean, but it was tangled and matted. I don't do many things well, but I must admit I've had notable experience untangling knotted hair mothering two little girls. I began brushing at the very bottom of the strands, remembering to take my time not to pull.*

*A miraculous thing happened to me as I started brushing that old man's hair... Everybody else in the room disappeared. There was no one alive for those moments except that old man and me. I brushed and brushed and I brushed until every tangle was out. I know this sounds so strange but I've never felt that kind of love for another soul in my entire life. I believe with all my heart, I—for that few minutes—felt a portion of the very love of God…The emotions were so strong and so pure that I knew they had to be God's.*

*His hair was finally as soft and smooth as an infant's. I slipped the brush back in the bag, went around the chair to face him. I got back down on my knees, put my hands on his knees, and said, ‘Sir, do you know my Jesus?’*

*He said, ‘Yes, I do. I've known Him since I married my bride. She wouldn't marry me until I got to know the Savior.’ He said, ‘You see, the problem is, I haven't seen my bride in months. I've had open-heart surgery, and she's been too ill to come see me. I was sitting here thinking to myself what a mess I must be for my bride.’”*

Beth concludes:

*“Only God knows how often He allows us to be part of a divine moment when we're completely unaware of the significance. God had intervened in details only He could have known. It was a God moment, and I'll never forget it.”[[1]](#endnote-1)*

*(Series Graphic)* How do you feel when you hear stories like this? Sure, many of us are touched. We might even tear up a little. But is anyone else willing to admit that stories like this are also a little terrifying? Sure, we love to hear them when they’re about other people, but we’re not so sure we want to find ourselves doing crazy things like this!

However, I’m going to be straight up with you this morning… If you and I are going to take the mission of Jesus seriously, we are in for an adventure. There’s no telling where he might send us and what he might lead us to do. Following Jesus isn’t meant to be comfortable; it’s meant to be life changing!

**Series Recap**

We are currently in a series called **“How to BLESS Your Neighbor”** that is all about our mission of **“helping people find their way back to God”**. Understand, this isn’t just the mission of COMMUNITY Christian Church, this is *your* mission, this is *my* mission, this is *our* mission.

And yet, too often rather than getting into the game, we sit on the sidelines waiting for someone else to carry out the mission. Instead of ***helping*** people find their way back to God, we sit back ***hoping*** people find their way back to God.

So during this series, we’re challenging one another live the mission of Jesus. And through the years we’ve discovered that the best way to live this mission is to be a BLESSING to the people and places God puts in our lives.

This blessing strategy isn’t anything new. *(Genesis 12:2-3)* In fact, it can be traced all the way back to the first book in the Bible when God tells Abraham that his people are blessed to be a blessing. Every one of us has been blessed to be a blessing! And so during this series we are challenging one another to identify the people and the places we’ve been called to **B.L.E.S.S.**

As a reminder, this acronym, BLESS, stands for five missional practices we can live to carry out the Jesus mission every day. And today, we’re going to talk about the first one, the “B.” B stands for **Begin with Prayer**.

**Reasons We Don’t Pray**

Prayer is one of those things – like flossing or exercise or going to bed at a decent hour – that we know we should do but often don’t do.

Every time I go to the dentist, my dentist asks me if I’m flossing regularly. How many of us are tempted to lie in that situation? I don’t want to tell my dentist that I’m not doing what I know I should do so I usually respond, “I’m flossing the same amount as the last time you asked me.”

Pray can be like that for most of us. It’s something we know we should do, something we even want to do, but it can be hard to be consistent at it. Why is that? There are a lot, here are three I hear I think there are a number of reasons. *(“Reasons We Don’t Pray” heading)*

* Sometimes we don’t pray because: **“I don’t know how.”** Many of us learned to pray as children—mostly at meals and at bedtime. But how many people reach adulthood without any additional instruction? We know we should pray, but many of us aren’t sure how.
* Sometimes we don’t pray because: *(add)* **“I’m too busy.”** Let’s face it… prayer takes time, it takes focus, it takes energy; and many of us feel like we’re running short on all of those things. Our busy lives crowd out a lot of things we know are important, and oftentimes that includes prayer.
* And sometimes we don’t pray because: *(add)* **“I doubt it works.”** **~~“I’ve prayed before and nothing happened.”~~** We think, “I prayed, I really did, and it didn't seem to make any difference.” I’ve felt that way before. Maybe it’s led you to question whether you even believe in prayer. When we pray and nothing seems to happen, it makes prayer really difficult.

There are lots of reasons why we don’t pray, but today I’m going to challenge every one of us, myself included, to move beyond ~~the excuses…to stop~~ just *hoping* people find their way back to God and start *helping*. *(Begin with Prayer)* We do this by beginning with prayer. And we have a great motivation for doing so… The best reason to become a person who consistently prays is because we follow someone whose life was characterized by prayer.

**Jesus Begins With Prayer**

Jesus is the one we follow. His whole life was a blessing to the world. Every place that he went, every person he encountered experienced a “God moment” in his presence. Jesus lived out the BLESS practices in his daily life on earth, and he did that by beginning with prayer.

If you read through the Gospels that tell the story of Jesus, you see a consistent pattern of prayer. *(Build lists of Scripture three at a time)*

* *(Luke 3:21)* Jesus prays at his baptism, and the heavens are opened as he is filled with the Holy Spirit and blessed by the Father.
* *(Luke 4:16)* Jesus had a regular practice of withdrawing from the crowds by himself to pray.
* *(Luke 9:16a)* Jesus prayed before performing miracles asking the Father to bless the work he was doing.
* *(Luke 22:32)* Jesus prayed for his friends, that they would remain strong in their faith.
* *(Luke 22:41)* Jesus spent the night before his crucifixion alone in a garden praying.

Over and over again, we see Jesus prioritizing prayer. And I’d like for us to focus in on one of these occasions… a time when Jesus was deciding whom to invest his time, effort, and energy in to further his mission and, you guessed it… he begins with prayer.

Luke, a historian records it like this:

**“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.  When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:  Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.” -Luke 6:12-16**

Just a chapter before, Jesus had started to identify those whom he would invest himself into. There were quite a few great candidates to become an apprentice of Jesus. But Jesus is very intentional about not skipping prayer. I am sure that in the pool of candidates there were some that had apparent potential. I am sure that there were some candidates that seem to have some leadership. I mean, it is easy to identify those who could potentially make a great leader, a great apprentice or someone who could benefit the Jesus mission. However, because Jesus knew that the stakes were high, because he knew that through these guys, he would be able to BLESS even more people, he spend the night praying. A whole night praying to the Father!

Luke does not tell us what his prayer was like. It does not tell us either how the Father confirmed Jesus the people who were to be his intimate friends who he would BLESS. But what the story tell us that in the morning when it was time to choose, Jesus had clear direction. And it is important to notice that he did not choose those who he liked the most, or the ones that were more prepared. For some reason he chooses fishermen, tax collectors, a religious zealous and even the man who would later on betray him. Why is this important? Because when we begin with prayer asking God to confirm us who are those who we wants us to BLESS, the choices may not be as clear as we expect. Let me give you an example.

**Story: Rodrigo Cano**

I (Rodrigo) was still living in Grand Rapids Michigan, and I had been praying for some time for God to show me who to BLESS. I have to be honest, the direction was not always clear. I never heard a loud voice, I think I would faint it that were to happen. But I did feel a hunch. I felt that I was supposed to be around a place called downtown market. So I parked my car, and just started walking and praying.

When I got close to the downtown market entrance, I realized there was a man. His clothes were dirty, he looked unkempt, and he was asking for money. As I got closer to him, I realized that he was speaking Spanish. People were rejecting him and ignoring him. Once again, no clear voice, just a hunch that I needed to talk to him.

So I went to him and asked him what was going on. He tells me: the kitchen that serves food was closed and I have not eaten today and I am really hungry. So I invited him to eat some tacos with me. We go into this place, and everyone is looking at us. It is evident that this person is homeless and he is not welcomed in this place. I am in his company and therefore I am also not welcomed in this place. But we ignore those things, and got something to eat. I told him, eat as much as you want, but he did not want to abuse the generosity so he only ate a few tacos.

We talked about many things, but in our way out I told him: do you know that God loves you? I am Christian and I just want to let you know that God loves you. Can I pray for you? His eyes started to get watery and he tells me: My brother is a pastor in Mexico, I talked to him this week and he told me that God would send someone to remind me how much God loves me and you are that person. I could not believe what he was saying, I mean I believe we are called to BLESS, but never did I imagine my prayer was the answer to someone else’s prayer thousands of miles away. We prayed together and I committed to follow up with him. Next week, as I was trying to reach out to him, I was told that he returned to Mexico because he wanted to change and he knew that he was not going to be able to do it in Michigan.

**Challenge: Begin with Prayer**

If you and I really want to see the mission of helping people find their way back to God, we have to begin with prayer. We cannot longer be a church that hopes people will find their way back to God, but we need to take ownership of the part that we have to do and let God do the part that only he can do. I know it is risky and it is uncomfortable, there is no way around it. But only God knows the impact that you and I can make in someone’s life and the repercussions that BLESSing someone will have in the lives of those who in return they can BLESS as well. But it all begins with simple steps, it all begins with prayer. Hudson Taylor a British missionary to China said this:

**"Do not have your concert first, and then tune your instrument afterwards. Begin the day with the Word of God and prayer, and get first of all into harmony with Him.” –Hudson Taylor**

So my challenge for all of us, including me, is for us to set apart some time to pray everyday. We don’t have to start by praying all night like Jesus did, not even a whole hour as he asked his disciples to do, but we can all begin by praying at least 5 minutes in the morning and 1 or 2 minutes at night. This is something that all of us can put into practice and I want to show you a practical way to do it:

First, **Plan**: Things that are important for us get in the calendar. If we want to be intentional about setting time apart to pray, I want to challenge you to plan for it. Put it on your calendar. Set a reminder on your phone and set an alarm that will remind you that you are planning to pray.

Next, *(add)* **Prepare**: As you pray, as God to prepare your heart for the adventure. As I mentioned before, this is something that we know we need to do, and it is something that we would like to do, but let’s be honest, this is hard. The only way we can BLESS others is by asking God to prepare our hearts for the adventure to come. Ask God to give you eyes to see the vision and a heart to make it happen. Ask God to give you eyes to see people with compassion.

Finally, think of *(add)* **Places/People**: As you pray, make a mental map of the places you will visit for the day. Who are some of the people that you will encounter? Maybe God has already put in your heart a place and/or people that you are supposed to BLESS. Remember that many times it is not so obvious, and remember that sometimes is not a clear voice speaking to you but rather a hunch that you are supposed to BLESS someone. Pray for those places, pray for those people, and ask God for an opportunity to BLESS. There will be days that nothing will happen, so don’t give up. There were will other days when something will happen. Let’s be patient.

At the end of the day, take one or two minutes just to give thanks for the adventure of the day. As we start putting this into practice, we will have many reasons to give thanks to God.

**Conclusion**

Bring more emotion into conclusion. Bring us back to the adventure. “When you listen to a story about a hairbrush, about tacos, you are moved…imagine if you got to live a story.”

We want to give you the opportunity to try it, so we are going to create a moment to pray right now. You don’t have to worry, no one will ask you to pray out loud or in front of other people. But we want to guide you in a moment of prayer where we will ask God a few things:

1. For God to give us the desire to pray.
2. For God to prepare our hearts for the adventure
3. For clarity in regards of who the people and/or the places God is calling us to BLESS

So as I close, I want to ask you to bow your heads, and in this moment, just talk to God in the quietness of your heart.

*(Lead people in prayer according to the above prompts)*

*Close:* God, you are awesome, no one compares to you. We come confessing that many times we struggle to pray. Thank you for the opportunity you give us to come before you. So we ask, give us a desire to pray, prepare our hearts to BLESS others, and make it evident to the places and people who are calling us to BLESS. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

**Communion Prep**

It was at Gethsemane that Jesus prayed a crucial prayer in history. As he knew what was about to happen to him he asked the Father: is there another way we can accomplish the mission? Is there another way to do this? But then he says: but your will be done and not mine. As we know, Jesus paid the price. But dead could not hold him back. He rose from the dead and gave us the victory that we needed. And in doing so, he tore the veil that separated us from God and now we have 24/7 access to God. Not only that, but he gives us the strength to BLESS others by his Spirit. In communion we remember the sacrifice and the victory of Jesus. The bread represents his body given for us and the juice represents the blood of the

1. <http://www.proclaimhisglory.org/html/lesson_with_a_hairbrush.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)