**How to BLESS Your Neighbor – Week 6 – Story**

**Message Big Idea**: In order to BLESS our neighbor, Jesus invites us to share how our story intersects with God’s story.

**Scripture:** Romans 10:13-15, John 9:1-34

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**Make sure keep “bless” language. Maybe the words we need to say: “Will you come to church with me?” Friend day.**

**Introduction: Without Words**

*(Series Graphic)* When God created human beings, he designed us with an incredibly complex set of tools for communicating with one another. Think about it. Sure, we can communicate with words spoken or written or sung, but there so many other ways we communicate without words.

For example, we communicate with facial expressions. *(Demonstrate)* With a smile to communicate friendliness, approval, or happiness. With a furrowed brow to communicate anger, disapproval, or frustration.

What are some of the other ways we communicate without words? *(Take 2-3 responses and play off the answers to demonstrate these nonverbal forms of communication. Make this fun and light-hearted. Here are some examples…)*

“Eyes” – As the famous quote says, “The eyes are the window to the soul.” Whether it is *(demonstrate with your eyes)* surprise, terror, sadness, or side-eye… Our eyes speak volumes!

“Touch” – So true! You can communicate a lot through a high-five or a hug! *(Could go into audience and demonstrate)*

“Gestures” – Oh, yes, gestures! If I do this… *(Pretend you’re going to make a gesture and stop yourself)* Oh, wait. We’re in church…I shouldn’t make that gesture. But, yes, we can communicate a lot with gestures!

“Posture” – Yes, our posture communicates a ton about our openness and interest. That’s why it is important that you all help me out by sitting on the edge of your chair and leaning forward!

There are so many ways we communicate without words, and when it comes to helping people find their way back to God, most of us hope we can do it without words.

It’s true, isn’t it?

It’s why we love the classic saying:

**“Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary use words.”**

Most of us hope words are never necessary. But can we really carry out the mission of Jesus without words?

**Series Recap**

Today we are concluding our series **“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 all throughout this series, we’ve been challenging one another to *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. We’ve challenged one another to 5 missional practices we call the *(Heading)* **B.L.E.S.S.** practices. *(Add each one at a time)*

* “B” stands for **“Begin with Prayer”** as we join God in his work and ask him to lead us.
* “L” stands for **“Listen”** as we open our ears to come to know and understand the people to whom we’ve been sent.
* “E” stands for **“Eat”** as we share meals with people to intentionally build relationships.
* The first “S” stands for **“Serve”** as we give of ourselves to meet practical needs around us.

And most of us get on board with these first four practices. They aren’t hard to carry out. And we can do all of them without words. But “BLESS” isn’t complete without the final “S.”

* The final “S” stands for share your **“Story”**.

To bless the world and help people find their way back to God, words are necessary.

**Sharing the Story**

However, most of us hold back. It might not even be because we don’t recognize when the opportunities come to speak up. You ever get that feeling that you should say something? You know, those moments in a conversation where you get that fluttery feeling in the pit of your stomach, or that voice inside of your head that says “This is it! There is something I could and should say about my relationship with God in this moment.”

But even though the words are on the tip of our tongue, we may stop our selves from saying anything. Why? Why do we often hold back from sharing our story?

Maybe we’ve bought into the lie that **“I don’t have what it takes.”** Sharing our story is only for the more religious people, those who understand more of the Bible than I do. That’s what the Pastor is supposed to do, right? Or, what if a debate were to break out after I share my story and I don’t have all the answers?

Friends, I’m here to humbly admit that I (Teaching Pastor) don’t have all the answers either. You can do what I always do when difficult questions arise, just direct all of them to jasonishmael@communitychristian.org and he’ll be glad to take it from there! ☺

In all seriousness, while I may not have all the answers to life’s most challenging questions, one thing I do know is that we’re not supposed to do this alone. According to the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says all authority in Heaven and on Earth is his, and with that, he is with us every step of the way! It’s his Spirit that gives us the words in those moments. It’s all up to his power, not our own. If you are a Christ-Follower, you have the Spirit of God living in you. THAT’s what it takes.

Is this too redundant with the intro? Should we use a different excuse? “I don’t want to impose my beliefs on other people.” Another excuse to not share our story is that instead, **“I witness with my life.”** Often times this can be with the best intentions, however. Certainly living out what we believe is vital to our life with Jesus. In fact, James’ brother Jesus says, “Faith without works is dead!”

However, trying to share our story without words is like listening to the news with the sound turned off. You can see the newscaster excited about something, but you have no idea what is really going on. It brings us back to that popular saying we mentioned earlier, “**Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary use words.”**

Paul seems to call this out in Romans starting with a beautiful truth:

 **“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” -Romans 10:13**

Calling on the name of the Lord is life-giving hope! But then he challenges us in the responsibility this carries: Should we use a different version that doesn’t use “preacher”? Or explain what the word preach means.

Move this down to “uncomfortable” point?

**“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:14-15**

Yes, our lives should tell the story of Jesus. But it’s our words of hope and truth that are the necessary in sharing with those who have yet not heard.

Finally, we can stop our selves from sharing our story, because, **“It makes me feel uncomfortable.”** I have to cut right to the chase on this one, you ready? Of course it does! Its been said different word? evangelism can be “Two nervous people talking to each other.” We have to understand though there is a battle underway, good versus evil. The Evil One can use feelings of discomfort and doubt to try to stop a life-giving message.

Pastor Charles Stanley puts it this way:

**“God’s plan for enlarging His kingdom is so simple – one person telling another about the Savior. Yet we’re busy and full of excuses. Just remember, someone’s eternal destiny is at stake. The joy you’ll have when you meet that person in heaven will far exceed any discomfort you felt in sharing the gospel.” –Charles Stanley**

While the discomfort may be real, we have to also realize, the message we are carrying is important enough for a little temporary awkwardness.

Sharing the story is sharing YOUR story. It doesn’t have to be complicated.

**Word: John 9:1-34**

Let’s turn to John 9 to explain what I mean. Here John tells us about a guy who had to share his story in some pretty intimidating circumstances. Perhaps he was even wrestling with some of the things that have held us back from sharing ours as well.

The story begins,

**“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.” -John 9:1**

Jesus is apparently out for a stroll in Jerusalem when he encounters this man. We never learn the man’s name, the only thing we know about him is that he was born blind. From that one piece of knowledge, it’s safe to surmise that he lived his life on the short end of society. In fact, if we jump ahead in the story a little, those who knew him in that community knew him as…

*(add to screen)* ***“…*the man who used to sit and beg.” –John 9:8**

We shouldn’t be surprised that this person is a central character in this story, however. God seems to make a habit of using the lowly, the ordinary, the seemingly insignificant to reveal the depths of his glory.

As Jesus encounters this guy, he does a strange thing.

**“Then he** (Jesus) **spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes.” -John 9:6**

Now, good thing this isn’t my story, because I’m not sure I would have been very cooperative…seems a little gross. Not only do I not want someone else’s slobber in my eyes, but I also got a piece of dust in my eye one time, and it was horrible!

*(John 9:7)* But thankfully, the blind man plays along. Following Jesus’ instructions, he goes and washes and check this out: A miracle happens! This man who had been blind since birth can all of a sudden now see! Can you even imagine? I wonder if this is where we get the saying “rub some dirt on it.”

Anyway, the guy is obviously thrilled, and he couldn’t help himself but tell others about his life change. His friends themselves can’t help but notice this change in him and ask what happened:

Pool of Siloam was steps down…paint the picture of the man stumbling.

**“He told them, ‘The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, “Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.” So I went and washed, and now I can see!’” -John 9:11**

Despite the man’s inability to fully explain how, he simply told them what Jesus had done for him. He was overcome with amazement as he says he did what Jesus asked him to do, and now his life is forever changed.

But not everyone is rejoicing. Jesus’ adversaries, the Pharisees, are none too happy about what is happening. They’ve been concerned with Jesus’ rising popularity for some time now, and here it seems its taken on a whole new level. Despite their skepticism of who Jesus was, even they seem to recognize the man has been changed. Remember, he was known around town as a blind beggar, but now he’s walking around able to see! As doubtful as the Pharisees are, it’s hard to argue with clear evidence of a changed life.

Yet, the Pharisees still doubt and try to trap Jesus. It just so happened the Jesus healed the guy on the Sabbath, which was against their law and only solidified their belief that Jesus is a sinner. They drag this formerly blind man in to meet before their council, which, as I mentioned, would have been pretty intimidating. The Pharisees had threatened to exclude anyone from the synagogue who claimed Jesus was the Messiah, and that was a big deal. Can we cut this? The synagogue was the center of the whole community in 1st-Century Judaism. To be “put out” of the synagogue would mean becoming an outcast in your own hometown.

So the Pharisees say to the man:

**“Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” -John 9:24**

But the man replies: *(Add to slide)*

**“Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” -John 9:25**

I love his reply! He knew he wasn’t going to out-debate the religious leaders. He didn’t try to quote Scripture or articulate theology. But he also wasn’t going to back down in what had happened to him. He simply told how he had been changed. He shared his story. His life was so changed by his encounter with Jesus, he couldn’t help but to share his story. He says, *“I was blind but now I see!”*

**Sharing Your Story**

Today I want to suggest that this man’s story can provide a simple template for telling our own story. It looks like this:

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

What was your life like before you met Jesus? Or if you grew up in church knowing all about Jesus, what was your life like before you got serious about following him? Your story begins with who you were. Then…

*(add)* **How I Met Jesus.** “He put mud on my eyes,” the man would say.

How did you find your way back to God?

* Did a **friend** invite you to church?
* Did a **family member** introduce you to Jesus?
* Did you go through a **hard time** in life that led you to God?
* Did an **experience** inspire you to get serious about committing your life to him?

How you met Jesus is an important part of your story. And…

*(add)***My Life Since I Met Jesus.** “Oh, I was blind…BUT NOW I SEE!”

What difference has finding your way back to God made in your life? How are you different? What has changed about your perspective? How has knowing Jesus impacted how you walk through both the good and the hard things in life?

To bless people, you don’t need to be a theological expert or a spiritual giant; you simply need to share your story…

**Video: 3 People who Demonstrate “Share Your Story”**

*(TP share your story)* Every one of us has a story to share. I (Tammy) grew up in home where following Jesus and being involved in a church community were priorities. And yet, from the time I was a kid until I graduated high school, my understanding of what it meant to be a Christian pretty much revolved around a list of rules I kept, a list of things I did and didn’t do. And I did my best to be a good girl…to follow all the rules.

But the summer after I graduated, I went to Europe to play basketball with a mission team, and there I met a group of people just a little bit older than me who seemed to know God in a way I hadn’t experienced him yet. They were passionate about him. They were serious about spending time with him. They wanted to change the world by serving him.

That month in Europe changed my life. When I returned and started college, I was determined to pursue Jesus and find a community of Christ-followers who wanted to live on mission. I became heavily involved in a campus ministry at my university, and the four years I spent there changed the trajectory of my life. Now, I long for nothing more than to know Christ, to intimately know him. He is my constant friend. He is my rock in hard times. He is everything to me. I can’t imagine my life without his presence. And his mission gives my life meaning. I love waking up every morning knowing I am part of a grand story that will never end.

**Challenge**

Everyone of us has a story to share, and so today I want to leave you with three challenges.

The first is this… **Challenge #1 – Let God Write Your Story**. Maybe you are here today, and you haven’t yet had a life-altering encounter with Jesus. I am so glad you are here today! Who knows? It might even be today, in this place, where you encounter the one who has loved you from before time began. No matter what has happened in your life to this point, no matter where you’ve been, no matter what you’ve done, God wants to write a new story with your life moving forward. If you have not yet met Jesus, let us introduce you to him today. Come talk to me or a member of our prayer team or stick around for the After Party. We would love to help you take a step forward on your spiritual journey today.

The second challenge… **Challenge #2 – Compose Your Story**. If you have found your way back to God, I want to challenge you to take some time this week to craft your story. Write it down.

* My life before I met Jesus.
* How I met Jesus.
* My life since I met Jesus.

You don’t have to write a book, just compose a simple 1 or 2 minute version of your story. The Apostle Peter challenges us:

**“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” -1 Peter 3:15**

If you are beginning with prayer, listening, eating, and serving, there will come a time when someone asks you about your life. Are you ready to share your story? Take some time this week to compose your story so that when that time comes, you’ll know what you want to share.

And the final challenge… **Challenge #3 – Ask God for an Opportunity to Share Your Story**. Words are necessary. To carry out the mission of Jesus, we have to use words. So be bold, be willing to be stretched out of your comfort zone, and ask God for an opportunity to share your story with the people and in the places to which you have been sent.

**Conclusion**

*(Romans 10:13-15)* ***“How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news.”***

Friends…

* We have been sent.
* So let’s go and share our stories.
* So that the people in our lives can hear.
* And believe.
* And find their way back to God.

**Communion**

As we prepare for Communion, let’s remember this beautiful truth we read earlier:

**“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Romans 10:13**

We can celebrate that hope, that confidence because of Jesus. If we call on his name, we can trust in an eternity with him. It’s a hope that even begins today. It’s a very real relationship that we can have with God today.

It’s this incredible hope that drives us to tell others about it. It’s the depth of God’s love for us, that he would send his son to die on a cross in our place, to pay a penalty that we deserved. It’s a gift of Grace that should drive us to love others, and to tell others about it. Let’s remember this hope we have as we take the bread and the juice. Let’s call on the name of Jesus, and thank him for the hope he has given us.