**How to BLESS Your Neighbor – Week 3 – Listen**

**Scripture:** Luke 18:35-43

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

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**Introduction Mondegreen**

*(Series graphic)* We all know someone… or *are* someone…who has a special knack for loudly singing the wrong lyric to a song. In fact, raise your hand if you are that person. Now, don’t lie, Jesus can see you… Alright, now point to the person in this room who *is* this person but doesn’t *know* it. Ah… there you are! It’s okay, we’re here for you.

Mishearing lyrics really is easy to do. Take, for example, this lyric from Creedence Clearwater Revival…

**Video: Misheard Lyrics 1**

Now, those are some helpful directions right in the middle of a concert!

Here’s another often-misheard lyric from a hit U2 song…

**Video: Misheard Lyrics 2**

I’m really not sure how those two things – sky phones and felines – make a day beautiful, but Bono is cool so we’ll trust him.

Let’s try one more, a classic…

**Video: Misheard Lyrics 3**

Kinda makes you want to find a “Who’s the Boss?” rerun, doesn’t it?

If you’re not listening closely, certain songs can be really confusing. But mishearing words doesn’t just happen with song lyrics. It probably most often happens with words in regular conversation. You may not know this, but this phenomenon is referred to as a *(Put in the form of a dictionary definition)* **Mondegreen**. A Mondegreen is a **“misheard word or phrase that makes sense in your head, but is, in fact, entirely incorrect.”**

This term “Mondegreen” was coined in 1954 by American author Sylvia Wright. In an article she wrote for Harper’s magazine, Wright admitted that all her life she had misheard an English poem her mom had read to her when she was a child. She thought the poem was a tragic love story ending with the line:

**“They have slain the Earl o’ Moray, and Lady Mondegreen.”**

Turns out the actual line was: *(add)*

**“They have slain the Earl o’ Moray, and laid him on the green.”**

Wright was devastated to realize poor old Earl was all by himself in the end![[1]](#endnote-1)

I think all of us can probably think of several of our own Mondegreen moments. And when they are misheard lines from a song or a poem, they can be really funny. But what about the times when what we’ve misheard are the words of the people around us?

Author David W. Augsburger writes:

**“Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.” ― David W. Augsburger**

Listening to people – really hearing and understanding what they are saying – is a critical expression of love. So how do we make sure we aren’t mishearing?

**Series Recap**

Over the last two weeks we’ve been in a series called **“How to BLESS Your Neighbor”** which is all about our mission of **“helping people find their way back to God”**. Helping people find their way back to God is not just a mission statement to memorize. It’s not just the mission statement of our church. It’s YOUR mission. It’s MY mission. It’s OUR mission!

Too often, though, we settle for being people who “hope” people find their way back to God instead of being people who “help” people find their way back to God. So, during this series we are equipping and challenging one another to be people who actually “help.”

Through the years, we’ve found that the best way to help, the best way to live out this mission is to be a BLESSing. *(BLESS graphic)* In fact, we often say that we are BLESSed *to be* a BLESSing.

Now, around here BLESS is actually an acronym that stands for five missional practices that are central to living out the Jesus mission. During this series we are challenging one another to identify the people and the places we’ve been called to BLESS.

Last week we challenged you to *(Graphic)* **Begin with Prayer**. *(BLESS Card)* If you didn’t get one these cards last week, I want to encourage you to pick one up today. There are blanks on this card where you can write in the names of the people or the places God is calling you to bless, and you can use this card as a reminder to pray for them.

Today we’re going to focus in on the second BLESS practice: *(Graphic)* **Listen**. This practice can be a game-changer in the lives of those we are called to bless!

**Not Really Listening**

Now, I’m sure I don’t have to convince you that we live in a world where hardly anybody *really* listens. Most people are more interested in what *they* have to say than in listening to someone else. There’s a famous saying that goes like this:

**“The opposite of listening is not speaking, it’s waiting to speak.” -Unknown**

Isn’t that true? That even when we’re not talking, a lot of times we’re not thinking about what the other person is saying, we’re thinking about what *we’re* gonna say. I struggle with this. Too many times I’m not really listening to people. I’m just cueing up what I’m gonna say next.

We’ve all experienced this from others too, haven’t we? How many of you have been in a conversation where it felt like the other person was there but not really there?

We have all been part of conversations where we or the other person was saying “uh-huh,” but not really listening. But if we want to stop “hoping” people find their way back to God and start “helping,” we have to become very intentional about listening. Listening is crucial in the Jesus Mission.

**Jesus as a Listener**

Jesus modeled this for us in incredible ways. Motivated by his love for everyone he came into contact with, we see Jesus, not just performing great miracles or teaching mind blowing truths, but also taking the time, again and again, to show love in the most practical and simple way… He listened.

*(Luke 18:35-43)* In Luke 18, Jesus hears the sounds of a blind beggar calling out on the side of the road, but he doesn’t just continue on with his business like everyone else. *(Highlight verse 40)* He stops, crouches down low, asks a question, and *actually listens* to the man. It’s not until after he listens to him that he blesses the man by healing him. Jesus took the time to listen to the people that no one else seemed to care for, the ones everyone else overlooked.

*(John 5:1-9a)* Again in John 5, Jesus is walking by a small pool of water outside a city gate, surrounded by a swirl of noise and humanity. But he notices a man lying there by the edge of the water. And what does Jesus do? *(Highlight verse 6)* He stops, he asks the man a question, and he listens to the man so he knows how to bless him.

Are you starting so see a pattern here?

*(Mark 6:b-7)* In Mark 6, Jesus sends out the 12 disciples to continue his mission in the surrounding towns. And they go out and BLESS hundreds of people, and when they return, here’s what happens: *(add)*

**“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported all they had done and taught.” -Mark 6:30**

Jesus listens.

If we flip through the pages of the Gospels, our attention is naturally drawn to the stories of Jesus doing over the top, amazing things like healing the sick, feeding thousands of hungry people, and even raising the dead. We tend to remember the exceptional and extraordinary moments, but it’s important that we don’t overlook the more frequent and ordinary moments. The moments when Jesus pulls up a chair to another person and just listens.

Living a life of BLESSing others like Jesus blessed others is not a journey of the spectacular. In fact, I believe it is best lived out in the regular. It’s in these regular moments of life where we can pull up within arms reach of another person and actually listen to what is going on in their hearts.

**Listening to People**

*(‘Listen’ Graphic)* I recently read a pretty dramatic story that I think illustrates the importance of getting close enough to listen to the people around us in order to BLESS them.

It took place in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in the early 90’s. A nurse had been watching a newborn for several hours. Suddenly, the baby turns dark blue. The medical team calls for a doctor and a radiologist and prepares to intervene, immediately assuming that the baby’s lungs have collapsed.

But the nurse is convinced that it’s a heart problem. As soon as she saw the baby’s color, she suspected there was an air pocket around the baby’s heart that was stopping it from beating. She screamed to her colleagues, “It’s the heart!” But they pointed to the heart monitor that showed the baby’s heart was beating normally.

She insists, pushes their hands away and orders them to be quiet as she places a stethoscope on the child’s chest. She stops the swirl of activity and actually listens to the heart of this child.

Not a sound. The heart is not beating.

A neonatal surgeon enters the room. The radiologist, who has just received the test results, confirms the nurse’s diagnostic. The surgeon performs a procedure that slowly releases the air pocket. The baby is safe.

Later, the team understood why the monitor had misled them: it was measuring the electrical activity commanding the heartbeats, and this had not stopped: the heart was simply unable to respond to it because of the air pocket pressure.

It’s a dramatic illustration, but one we can all learn from. How often do we get caught up in the swirl and activity of all the noise and commotion that surrounds us, and fail to listen to the hearts of the people around us?

* When was the last time I asked the single mom who lives next to me how she’s doing?
* When was the last time I stopped what I was doing to give my undivided attention to the person in the cubicle next to me?
* When was the last time I slowed down enough to listen to the cashier who casually mentioned that her husband has cancer?

Sometimes the only way to know how we can BLESS the people around us is if we, like Jesus and the nurse, slow down, quiet all the activity and noise, get within ear-shot, and truly LISTEN.

**Listening to Places**

We can’t bless the world without listening to people, but we need to also be listening to places. Here’s what I mean. If we want to listen to our community, or our city, I would encourage you and your small group to adopt a very simple missional practice. Grab a local newspaper and a highlighter and read it front to back. Or perhaps your city has an online local publication such as The Patch? Read these sources and as you do, highlight every need you come across. Once you highlight every need, simply allow that to drive a conversation in your group. Of these needs, which ones could we actually meet? Which ones are we particularly passionate about? By reading about our community, we may discover an organization that needs volunteers. We may learn about a local event that we can plug into. 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.

There is a story told by Michael Frost that illustrates this in a really powerful way. Frost is an author and church leader who has spent much of his career helping people discover how to live out the Jesus 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 and programs, and skilled workers ready to transform that village to a place of health and vitality. And they went to the people living in what was really a slum, 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. We could build a church so you could gather on the weekends and learn about God. So what do you want us to do for you?” Sounds a lot like the question that Jesus asked. And the people of the village said, “We need a mailbox. The missionaries said, “A mailbox? We can give you a school or a church building and all’s you want your own mailbox?” And the people said, “Yes, what we really need most is a mailbox.”

See in India, if you live in a slum, you do not have a mailbox, which means you don’t have a zip code, which means that you do not exist on a map. Even if you are a community of 10 or 20 thousand people, if you don’t have a zip code, you’re not recognized as existing for anything, including social services from the 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 with a zip code and a mailbox; but once they did, the village began to be changed.

Are we giving attention to the places God has placed us? Are we really listening? The Apostle Paul knew how to listen to places as well. Listen to what we see in Acts 17:

**“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.’” – Acts 17:22-23**

Before Paul proclaims, he observes. He “walked and looked carefully” at the culture he was going to address. And once he had, he says this:

**“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” – Acts 17:24-25**

Paul understood the inextricable importance of learning to pay attention to the place he was in; leaning in to what God might have him do there.

Author Dallas Willard put it this way:

 **“The first act of love is always the giving of attention.” -Dallas Willard**

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

**Challenge: Listen Daily**

*(B.L.E.S.S. graphic)* To BLESS the world, we have to start with the B: we begin with prayer. And next the L: we listen to the people and the places where we live and work and play.

*(Hold BLESS Card)* Think about the people and places you wrote down on this card… the people and places you have been called to BLESS. What if, as we begin with prayer, part of that prayer each morning is simply:

**“Jesus, help me to listen today.”**

And then we listen. Every day.

Maybe we’ll hear of a **practical need** that we can easily meet.

Maybe we’ll hear an **emotional need** that our presence and friendship will help soothe.

Maybe we’ll hear a **spiritual need** and have the opportunity to point someone to Jesus.

Think about that… maybe just by listening, God will open up a door for us to invite someone to Friend Day here at COMMUNITY on September 15.

This is how we live out the Jesus mission. This is how we move beyond merely “hoping” people find their way back to God to “helping” people find their way back to God.

Jesus heard one man’s voice in a huge crowd of people, and everyday, each of us comes into contact with people who nobody cares about and nobody listens to. May we be people that have the heart of Jesus through whom God will change lives and changes the world. People who are always praying, “Jesus, help me to listen today.”

**Conclusion: Transformed**

And here’s the secret of all of this. When we live out these missional practices, when we begin with prayer and listen, not only will we bless the people and communities around us, we’ll be transformed ourselves. We will see and hear more clearly. We will grow in compassion and empathy for others. We will get glimpses of how God is at work.

I’ll often hear people say, “I’ll serve once I’ve grown a little more in my faith, once I’m a little more mature” to which I always say, “One of the main vehicles by *which* God grows and matures us is by serving!” The invitation isn’t to have it all figured out, have all our theological ducks in a row, or dot every doctrinal “i” – it’s to step out in faith and trust the God who loved us so much he came after us and keeps coming after us time and time again.

When we learn to truly listen, we’ll find that God does a transformative work in us as well. Let’s pray.

**Communion Idea**

At communion, we celebrate and remember that Jesus listened – really listened, to what God was leading him toward. When he even pleaded with God that there be a different way than the cross, he listened and responded, even though it led to his execution. When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we’re not only remembering something Jesus did thousands of years ago that allows us access to Heaven when we die. In fact, the Apostle Paul says, “that when we eat this bread and drink this cup, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” Coming to the table, we don’t take, but receive the free gift of grace that God offers through Jesus, but it we also receive an invitation to live on mission with him wherever we go. That is the beautiful scandal of the communion table.

1. <https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/science-misheard-lyrics-mondegreens> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)