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Discipleship Course friends
every good neighborhood
god's others living loving faith

Introduction

Love the Lord God with all your heart ... Love your neighbor as yourself.

You know these commandments as Jesus' instructions to be His disciple. But these two great commandments aren't given equal focus in ministry today. As a Christian, you've heard countless sermons, read books, and participated in studies on how to "love God."

But it's rare to find teachings on how to "love your neighbor."

This course will guide you on your way to loving your neighbor and living more like Jesus.

You'll Learn

- A practical plan for loving your neighbors in today's culture
- How to find a sense of purpose
- How to live on mission in community
- To have a closer relationship with Jesus
- How to have more meaningful conversations with friends

We Want To Invest In You

Our goal at Love KC is to equip you to live your faith with confidence and help you know what to say to your friends about Jesus.

To invest in you is a privilege, and we invite you into a partnership to extend the Love KC mission. We don't charge for this content, but if you want to pass this on to others—please join in.

How To Invest In Others

To give electronically: Love KC c/o The Signatry, at 7171 W. 95th, Suite 501, Overland Park, KS, 66212.

To give by check you can send the donation to: Love KC, 13505 S. Our-Len Rd., Suite 131, Olathe, KS, 66062



It's All About Love

1. We sing about love. The movie industry makes a living on love stories. Teens lay in their beds at night dreaming about love. Wars have been fought; cross-country moves are made, last names change—all because of love.

It's been said love makes the world go 'round. Is there anything better?

Apparently not!

At least that's what God the Father thought when He made us. To reduce the message of Jesus to anything less is to miss the point—God is madly in love with you!

A Love Story

From the beginning of time, the gospel is a love story where God reveals His love and places His loved ones in a paradise. They don't return His love but instead turn selfishly to their own interests. They forfeit the garden but not His love.

This is where the story is fascinating beyond expectations. Jesus comes on a rescue mission to win back His loved ones at the cost of His own life.

No other love story does this mission justice. Jesus joins humanity and dies for the sin of His beloved. In doing so, He conquers death and purchases our freedom.

You are I are a part of the story. We too have ignored God's love. This is our story too.

Now here comes the risky part, He doesn't force us to love Him because manipulation is not love. So once again, He loves at the cost of being misunderstood, unappreciated, and rejected. And that's exactly what happened.

Get this! No one has ever loved better, more consistently, and as unconditionally!

And still, we hesitate.

Why?

Maybe we just can't believe it is real. Perhaps we don't feel we deserve it—hint, hint, we don't! It could be we want to stay in control.

But the offer is there for us.

What will we do?

The world has never known a greater love, and, for now, we still have time to respond with a yes.

Say, Yes!

Saying yes is to realize the deepest longing of the human soul—to love and be loved. It is a love that is truly good for us. It is fulfilling, freeing, empowering, and eternal. There's nothing better!

Until we embrace the love of God reaching to us, we have nothing lasting to give away.

But once we have experienced the love of God for us, it is the most natural thing in the world to tell others. This is what we do when we find something good.

If we love a song, we sing it. If something good happens to us, we tell it. And definitely, if we fall in love, we tell somebody—probably everybody important to us!

Am I right?

This is Why We're Here

We want to tell our friends about the love we found, but how? We want our friends to find what we've found in Jesus, but we don't want to force or manipulate because God didn't do that for us.

So, where do we start?

You're here, so let's dive right in. This book and online course are written so you can live your faith with confidence and know what to say to your friends about Jesus.

Of course, you will want to put it in your words and live it through your life, but you can do it, and we can help. That's why we call this a "field guide."

We will learn as we go. We will practice. We won't get it right every time, but we won't quit. We will keep it simple, brief, and action-able.

You Care About Your Friends

You know that the world can be cruel and cold without love. And, apart from God, we always seem to look for love in all the wrong places, often with painful results.

Is anything worse than falling for someone or something that turns out to be less than what we hoped? We've all been there. Ugh!

We Have An Enemy

It gets worse. It turns out we have an enemy of our soul who is in rebellion against God and wants to steal, kill, and destroy.

Life would be challenging enough if everything was neutral, but it's not! We have help in making bad decisions.

And then there is our own selfishness, but let's not go there for now. It's depressing, but that's not the end of the story. There's hope.

You're Not Alone

What you are reading is the Cliff Notes version of the gospel, the "good news." The story of Jesus's love carries divine power to rescue, redeem, and restore. His love changed you, and it supernaturally supersedes your best efforts! Wow, that's a mouthful!

What it means is you are not alone, and you have help!

Meet The Holy Spirit

When Jesus left His disciples, He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity. You've met the heavenly Father, Jesus, the Son, and now the Holy Spirit is here for you.

When you ask Jesus to forgive you and lead you, He does. He transforms you on the inside and gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He is your Guide.

Which would you rather have, a guide or a map?

You can have both. You have a guide in the person of the Holy Spirit who is a friend, helper, and advocate. And you can have the word of God, the Bible, which is a living word—meaning the Holy Spirit, who was the author is also the one to help you apply it to your everyday life.

The Holy Spirit will give you ideas, promptings, and direction to share the Good News with your friends.

Whew! Help is here!

Love Your Neighbor

This course builds on the foundation of God's love expressed through Jesus, supported by the wisdom of the Spirit given straight to your soul.

My Mom used to tell me that the reason why we need to share our faith is that sometimes people need "Jesus with skin on."

No doubt there's someone in your life who was that for you.

Who was that person?

Now you can be that person for others.

Who in your circle needs God's love?

We Are Here To Help

You have what you need at the most basic level so let's learn how to put it all together. In nine sessions, online course, you'll learn:

- It's All about Love – The introduction
- Session 1. Be a Friend
- Session 2. Pray
- Session 3. Invest in Your Circle
- Session 4. Engage in God's Word
- Session 5. Care
- Session 6. Share
- Session 7. Disciple
- Session 8. Live on Mission everyday
- Session 9. You were Made for This

We Learn By Doing

The lessons are intentionally short, leaving you with energy to start your own application before you run out of time.

Each lesson has a video story and links, which can lead you to even more content.

“Jesus” Means Savior

Did you know the name Jesus means “Savior?”

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:8, *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He paid the price for the sin of the world in hopes that one day we would realize we need him and turn to him.*

Wow! He purchased our freedom without a guarantee we would love Him in return.

Now that’s true love!

When John, the disciple turned writer, wanted to choose one word to describe God, he chose love. 1 John 4:8

Love is not only an action God performs. Love is who God is. God is love.

As Children of God, we Love like God

When we accept Jesus as our Forgiver and Leader, He transforms us to become like Him. Because He is love, we too will love.

John, the same writer as above, says that, *when we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.* 1 John 4:12

This is where we enter the story. If the world is going to see God, to know God’s love, it is up to us.

The Great Commission

Many have learned what is commonly called, The Great Commission, and often we can quote it, *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.* Matthew 28:19

The word we translate “all nations” actually means, make disciples of every ethnicity. I like the distinction the Greek language makes. This brings the Great Commission into my world and yours—especially if we think of ethnicity not purely in racial terms but someone culturally different from me.

If we think we have to go to some other world far, far, away to make disciples, it would be something unusual for us. It would be difficult and nearly impossible, which is what some think of when it comes to sharing their faith.

But when we think of reaching those like us and then those a step away culturally it is like thinking, I'm called to make disciples of those like me and those culturally diverse too. His mission becomes our mission.

The Great Commandments

I've found many believers also know the Great Commandments *You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. And, Love your neighbor as yourself.* Luke 10: 27

This is amazing! Jesus summed up the law and prophets into these two commandments, love God and love your neighbor.

Jesus didn't quote ten. He focused on two.

But sometimes we take the two and turn it into one.

How so you ask?

What's Your Plan?

I often ask the question, "what plan do you have for loving God more?"

The answers usually come quickly. I hear prayer, worship, study, etc.

When I ask the question, what's your plan for loving your neighbor?

I get the deer in the headlights look.

We can help you make a plan

Loving your neighbor like yourself is the application step to fulfilling the Great Commission.

It is simple—really, I promise, stick with the plan, and you'll see.

It's scale-able. Everyone has neighbors.

If we allow the Good News of God's love to flow through our circle of friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors, we can reach our world.

We say, “neighbor” equals those with whom we live, learn, work and play.

If those we reach also become disciples who do the same others, over time, we reach the whole world and fulfill the Great Commission.

Will you do your part?

Will you pass on love even as you’ve received God’s love?

You **CAN** do it!

Listen to the BLESS podcast [“It’s All About Love”](#).

Be a Friend

2.

You're likely reading today because you care about your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and relatives. You want them to find true life both here and in eternity. You'd love to know what to say to reach them. Keep listening, and we will get there together.

Your friends don't want a salesperson. They aren't looking for a tele-evangelist. They need you! Your friends are likely skeptical of the institutional church because the culture has claimed the dominant narrative.

But everyone wants to belong to a community of friends.

Many times a person needs to belong before they believe so they may be more open to a cup of coffee with you to talk about life than they are to an invitation to church. Maybe in today's world, we reach our friends in our neighborhood first and invite them to church after we have a relationship.

My friend, Rob Wagner, says, we need "feet under the table."

Your friends need your invitation to put THEIR feet under your table. And if they invite you to their home, you have a GREAT privilege to provide influence and share words of life.

You may be the only Jesus follower in the life of your friend. The apostle Paul says *always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks—be ready to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* 1 Peter 3:15

People are not projects, but you must realize God desires to use YOU. He's placed you in the life of your friends, and given your story. There is simply no other good substitute. My question to you is, are you prepared for the conversations?

It's Easier Than You Think

My Mom often told me to have a friend; you must be a friend. Be a friend to others, and you'll always have friends. Friendships are fertile soil for the gospel, the "Good News." I work in a co-working space where there may be as many as twenty businesses or entrepreneurs. It is wired with everything you need for success. There are private offices; there are cubicles, enclaves for meetings, two kitchens, and generous shared spaces. It makes for a family feel even while you are at work.

One day I overheard two guys having a conversation. One said to the other; I met this guy that seems to want to be a friend. That's cool, the other replied. Do you know him from your school days, was the next question. No, he keeps hanging around, and he seems to have a genuine interest. They seemed pleased.

What stood out to me was that both of the men seemed surprised and interested in making a new friend. Who doesn't want a friend?

The Good Samaritan

Sometimes it is not affinity that starts a friendship but availability.

Jesus told a parable we call "The Good Samaritan." It's a great story about keeping your head up and observing the needs of those who enter your sphere of influence with the love of God. You can find the story in Luke 10.

Luke 10

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[c]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[d]"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

There are many talking points in this story. I think about race relations. I can identify

with the busy schedules of the religious characters. I wonder how the Samaritan knew how much money to give the hotel owner, and wonder if that was that the best place to leave the guy? And in the process of over-thinking it and I forget all about loving my neighbor.

I can make this simple story of Jesus very complicated. Jesus doesn't tell us who our neighbor is, but how to neighbor. The who is, whoever needs you.

Your Actual Neighbor

And here is the kicker, what if Jesus meant for you to love your actual neighbor?

Yes, the one whose furry friend leaves deposits in your yard. Yes, the one who is loud and thoughtless at times (she thinks the same about you, by the way).

Yes, the one who drives into your yard and leaves a rut. Yes, the one who has friends over and takes up all the parking spaces—oh, wait, it's my friends who do that to my neighbors, not visa versa.

Q. Have you ever thought, I think Jesus means my actual neighbor?

We can make the story so aspirational, and about helping someone in need, we don't stop to think, maybe Jesus is saying to love my next-door neighbor as myself!

Loving your actual neighbor is messy and very personal. You can't love your neighbor as yourself from a distance. It requires involvement and investment.

Jesus The Incarnation

I love the way The Message translates John 1:14, *The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. Jesus modeled incarnational living for us. He lived in love, and he calls us to follow his example.*

What if we all did that? How would love change our world?

For one thing, we wouldn't need mass evangelism tactics. Love doesn't need a marketing pitch. We have an advantage when it comes to loving. Because God is love we can invite His love to flow through us.

Many non-Christians already know a disciple of Jesus. And if every disciple is committed to a simple lifestyle of love—love for God and love for their neighbor, the story of Jesus would become personal and real. Maybe folks would listen because everyone longs to love and be loved.

Connecting As Jesus Did

If we define neighbor as those with whom we live, work, study, and play, our sphere of influence is manageable. In each of our neighborhoods, people would wake up with someone praying for them by name, loving them as Jesus loves them—and loving them enough to share the story of Jesus.

Could it be that simple? I'm convinced Jesus meant it to be.

It is not just the message of Jesus that leads to life. The methods of Jesus are also compelling. What do we see Jesus do?

Jesus found common points of interest and engaged people in conversations that mattered. We can do the same. With Jesus, anyone is welcome—the child, the know-it-all, the widow, the needy, the one with a past. Oh wait, that's all of us. We all have a past! His message and methods work together; they shouldn't be separated.

Follow Jesus

Isn't this what it means to be a disciple: to follow Jesus, to do his work in his way? A disciple reproduces and even multiplies his faith by living on mission every day. A disciple makes disciples who make disciples until the whole world knows.

It starts with loving God and loving your neighbor.

You are hard-wired for this. Loving isn't something you need to go to school to do. It comes naturally. The Holy Spirit of Jesus, who lives within every believer, will prepare the way. Let the Spirit live and work through you.

We certainly need the Spirit and His leadership. And then comes the hard part—we need to obey.

The key characteristic of a disciple is not knowledge, but obedience. *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.* 1 Cor. 8:1 Don't equate discipleship with knowledge. Disciples imitate their leader.

In what ways are you practicing the methods of Jesus?

Your neighborhood may have fences or lawns that adjoin. You might live in an apartment with people above and below you. You could live on a farm, and your nearest neighbor is a quarter-mile away. There are many unique ways we share this big green-and-blue ball

we call earth.

Sometimes our “neighbors” are those with whom we share geography. But we can also expand our definition to include those within our sphere of influence.

Your Oikos

The Bible uses the Greek word oikos. The basic translation is “house,” but there is another meaning. Oikos can also describe a group of connected people—your immediate household, your extended family, but possibly even neighbors, coworkers, and friends. To put it another way, your oikos includes those with whom you have regular contact. We could call this our sphere of influence.

After casting a mob of demons out of one man, Jesus told the one delivered to go back to his oikos and tell his story.

The apostle Paul told his jailer that trusting Christ would bring salvation to him and his oikos.

Another time a government official, a synagogue leader, and a tax collector each came to faith in Jesus—and the blessings extended to each man’s oikos.

Whatever that sphere of influence was, we can see that salvation spread quickly through the social circle.

When the restored demoniac went back to his friends and family they would know better than anyone the transformation that took place. He should start with those who knew him best and the same is true for you and me.

Creating Community

We might as well admit it. We are tempted to live in a singular, separated, individual way—in cocoons of our own making. We have what sociologists call, crowded loneliness. There is terror on the news and in our schools, so we have deadbolts and fences. Electronic devices compete for our attention every waking moment, but even online chats turn into arguments. We over-medicate to numb ourselves from life’s accumulated losses. This is the state of humanity—desperate for community, but clueless about creating it.

The Bible reminds us that community is often the best arena for the Good News of Jesus. Faith tends to fill a household, overflowing to a whole sphere of influence. Jesus can still “move into a neighborhood”—through you.

It starts with the simple connections that create community. Be present. Keep your eyes up looking for needs in the eyes of those around you. Don't let your screen time consume you in public spaces. Listen to the voices around you and listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

Are there people you see regularly? Maybe they are the parents of the other players on your son's soccer team. You sit with them every couple of days in the summer. What about the barista at your favorite coffee shop? Do you often see the same checkout lady at the department store? Could you learn their names? Could you start a conversation? Would you be available if God wants to touch their lives through you?

Who Is In Your Oikos?

Much of this connecting can happen naturally, once you are aware. But it wouldn't hurt to do some thinking about it. When this podcast concludes take 5 minutes and ask yourself, whom does my oikos include? Ask God to bring to mind people in your sphere of influence.

Write down their names and pray for them by name. As you pray, consider what God has in store for those people.

Is there a group to which you feel called? Or is God sending you to an individual?

Where is your mission field? How would you define it?

The apostle Paul said, *He (God) created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. Acts 17:26*

I don't think this verse speaks of predestination as much as it speaks of the foreknowledge of God. God desires to co-create with you. He gives you choices and then He works with you, in you, through you and sometimes—in spite of you to reach those in your circle of influence.

God wants to use you in your neighborhood. He has a purpose in your job. Let Him use you. God places people on your heart because he loves them and wants a relationship with them. Your mission is to share that love with them.

Presence Over Perfection

Presence is more important than perfection. Be genuinely interested in the life of

these friends, before you try to interest them in your pursuits. Listen. Ask open-ended questions. Reserve judgment. Invest. Lean into the concerns of others and move into the gospel at the speed of trust.

Don't have an agenda except for God's agenda. Have the patience to see what God will do. And then be ready for whatever happens.

Adopting Your Neighborhood

I'll tell you a story, One of my neighbors, Lorenzo, who is a follower of Jesus, was thinking of moving away from our community. Then a piercing question came into his mind. He believed it came from Jesus. The thought was this: Are you going to move before ever investing in your neighbors?

Tears came to Lorenzo's eyes as he realized he'd lived in his neighborhood for years but rarely reached out to his neighbors with God's love. Within the next two weeks, he and his wife, Kassie, were intentional in sharing God's love in natural ways. They took a meal to a person fighting cancer. They took cookies to a new couple that had recently moved in. They ended up praying for another couple and even got to share their faith in Jesus with another—all because they began living intentionally.

Now they've adopted their neighborhood as the mission field to which God's assigned them.

Lorenzo and Kassie both signed up at blesseveryhome.com to adopt their neighborhood. Then they cast vision to their small group to do the same and because they are in our neighborhood we added two more Lights!

You can listen to their podcast, Yes You Can here: <https://lovekc.libsyn.com/you-can-be-a-light>

Some of us have been taught that following Jesus equals going to church on Sunday as if that is our highest calling. We think discipleship means joining a Bible study group. If we use our spiritual gift in the church, we reach the zenith of spirituality. Or so we've heard.

Don't Just Go To Church, Be The Church!

God wants more for you!

We might learn something from the practice of dieting. To become healthy, some people will go on a crash diet. Paleo, South Beach, Mediterranean, DASH—you can count calories, add protein, work out, or whatever, and the chances are that you will lose

weight.

But then what? Will you make long-term changes to your lifestyle, or will you revert to long-standing patterns? We all know that the best way to stay healthy is to address our lifestyle choices. Eat smaller meals more often, and drink plenty of water. Get adequate sleep. Exercise early and often. Cut back on sugar. Many lose twenty pounds on a diet and then put on thirty when they get back to their lifelong routine—because they’ve never committed to changing their lifestyle.

Adopting your neighborhood is a lifestyle—a mindset. For many believers, it’s a paradigm shift. It’s not a list of religious things to do; it’s a commitment to loving God and loving others in every area of your life. It is spiritually healthy living.

In the next few chapters, we discuss this community-creating, neighborhood-adopting lifestyle. We call it “prayer, care, and share.” You’ll see numerous stories, best practices, and illustrations, but please don’t view them as tactics to learn.

The pray, care, and share is a way-of-living that positions us to be available to God and available to others. It can become as natural as breathing.

The Pray, Care, Share Lifestyle

Prayer, care, and share go together symbiotically. The three elements are not linear, but they wrap around one another, each one feeding into the others and drawing from them. Let’s look at each one individually, but we’ll be sure to put them back together in the end.

The Heart And The Tool

In these first two lessons, we start with what matters most—the heart. Once we have the heart right, we can add a useful tool. If we have the right heart and a potent tool, we well prepared.

I’ve found a tool that gives me great accountability for remembering to pray for my friends and literally walks me around my neighborhood. It is the website at blesseveryhome.com. You can go there. Select “Be a Light.” Set up a username and password. Add your address then watch for a confirmation email. If you don’t see it in a minute, check your SPAM.

Once your account is confirmed, you will receive a “daily five” email that walks you around your neighborhood in a month. The website is mobile friendly so you can have it with you all the time on your phone.

Watch this two-minute video by movie producer Stephen Kendrick:

<https://vimeo.com/207298856>

Get started today. Be a friend. Live like Jesus, where you are available to others. Love your neighbors as yourself—yes, your actual neighbors and use the best tools available. Then watch Jesus go to work in your life! He will set you up for conversations, and you'll see His fingerprints everywhere. The Holy Spirit will give you words when you need them.

You'll live your faith with confidence and know what to say to your friends about Jesus. Tell them about the life you've found!

To listen to the vision for every neighborhood in the United States being adopted by a disciple who lives the pray, care, and share lifestyle, listen to [The BLESS podcast with Founder, Chris Cooper](#).

Listen to The BLESS podcast ["Be A Friend"](#).

Keep Reading: Next we move to lesson 3. We give simple application steps to what you've learned here in lesson 2.

Go To Your World, Your Jerusalem, Your Friends

3.

I have called you friends.
Jesus, in John 15:15 NIV

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
John 13:35 NIV

We call Jesus' last words the Great Commission and they tell us to "go to all the world." So what if we start with going to OUR world? Go to your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, relatives, etc., with the Good News of Jesus.

You Were Made For This

The stories of the Bible are packed with potency! An expert in the law wanted to test Jesus in an attempt to trap him into saying something incriminating. Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?

I love the way Jesus boiled all the law and prophets down to two great commandments: loving God and loving your neighbor. He had a way of taking the complex and making it simple. We tend to do the opposite—just like the legal expert who asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus went on to tell the parable we call "The Good Samaritan." It's a great story about loving those who enter our sphere of influence with the love of God. There are many directions this story can take us. I think about race relations. I identify with the busy schedules of the religious characters. I wonder how the Samaritan knew how much money to give the hotel owner, and was that really the best place to leave the guy? And I forget all about loving my neighbor. I just made this simple point of Jesus very complex. Jesus doesn't tell us who our neighbor is, but how to neighbor. The who is... whoever needs you.

Your Neighbor

What if Jesus meant to love your actual neighbor?

Yes, the one whose furry friend leaves deposits in your yard. Yes, the one who is loud and thoughtless at times (she thinks the same about you, by the way). And the one who drives into your yard and leaves a rut. (Oh, wait, I was the one who did that!)

Loving your actual neighbor is messy and very personal. You can't love your neighbor as yourself from a distance. It requires involvement, investment. I love the way The Message translates John 1:14, The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. Jesus modeled incarnational living for us. He lived in love, and he calls us to follow his example.

What if we all did that? How would love change our world?

For one thing, we wouldn't need mass evangelism tactics or institutional church strategies. It's not a marketing pitch. It's just God's love flowing through us. Many non-Christians already know a disciple of Jesus. If every disciple is committed to a simple lifestyle of love—love for God and love for their neighbor, the story of Jesus would become personal and real. Maybe folks would listen. Everyone longs to love and be loved.

Connecting As Jesus Did

If we define "neighbor" as those with whom we live, work, study and play, our sphere of influence would be manageable. In each of our neighborhoods, people would wake up with someone praying for them by name, loving them as Jesus loves them—and loving them enough to share the story of Jesus.

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Isn't this what it means to be a disciple: to follow Jesus, to do his work in his way? A disciple reproduces and even multiplies his faith by living on mission every day. A disciple makes disciples who make disciples until the whole world knows. It starts with loving God and loving your neighbor.

You are hard-wired for this. Loving isn't something you need to go to school to do. It comes naturally. The Holy Spirit of Jesus, who lives within every believer, will prepare the way. Let the Spirit live and work through you.

The key characteristic of a disciple is not knowledge, but obedience. *Knowledge puffs up but love builds up.* -1 Corinthians 8:1, RSV. Don't equate discipleship with knowledge.

Disciples imitate their leader.

In what ways are you practicing the methods of Jesus?

Making And Being A Friend

Your neighborhood may have fences, or lawns that adjoin. You might live in an apartment, with people above and below you. You could live on a farm, so your nearest neighbor is a quarter-mile away. There are many unique ways we share this big green-and-blue ball we call earth.

Sometimes our “neighbors” are those who share that geography with us, but we can also expand our definition to include those within our sphere of influence.

After casting a mob of demons out of one man, Jesus told him to go back to his oikos and tell the story (Luke 8:39). The apostle Paul told his jailer that trusting Christ would bring salvation to him and his oikos (Acts 16:31). And this is repeated often in Scripture. A government official (John 4:53), a synagogue leader (Acts 18:8), and a tax collector (Luke 19:9) each come to faith in Jesus—and the blessings extend to each man’s oikos. Whatever that sphere of influence was, we can see that salvation spread quickly through the social circle. While the restored demoniac wanted to travel with Jesus and the disciples, Jesus sent him back to his friends and family. They would know better than anyone the transformation that took place. That was the man’s best place of ministry.

Creating Community

Nowadays, people are tempted to live in a singular, separated, individual way, in cocoons of our own making. There is terror on the news and in our schools, so we have deadbolts and fences. Electronic devices compete for our private attention every waking moment, but even online chats turn into arguments. We over-medicate to numb ourselves from life’s accumulated losses. We are lonely, even while surrounded by people.

This is the state of humanity—desperate for community, but clueless about creating it. The Bible reminds us that community is often the best arena for the Good News of Jesus. Faith tends to fill a household, overflowing to a whole sphere of influence. Jesus can still “move into a neighborhood”—through you.

How will this happen?

It starts with the simple connections that create community. Be present for your neighbors—for all those with whom you work, live, study, or play. Be a friend, a loving,

caring, listening friend.

Are there people you see regularly? Maybe they are the parents of the other players on your son's soccer team. You sit with them every couple of days in the summer. What about the barista at your favorite coffee shop? Do you often see the same checkout lady at the department store? Could you learn their names? Could you start a conversation? Could you be available if God wants to touch their lives through you? How could God use you to carry his love?

Much of this connecting can happen naturally, once you open the door. But it wouldn't hurt to do some thinking about it. Who does your oikos include? Ask God to bring to mind people in your sphere of influence. Write down their names and pray for them by name. As you pray, consider what God has in store for those people.

Is there a group to which you feel called? Or is God sending you to an individual? How is the Spirit prompting you?

Perhaps God has placed you where you live, work, study or play for a specific purpose you haven't considered yet. You may be the only believer in someone's life, or you may be part of a tag team, sharing God's message over a period of years.

In our marketing-savvy world, we sometimes turn the Good News into a sales pitch, and our friends into targets. Steer clear of that. God places these people on your heart because he loves them and wants a relationship with them. Your mission is to share that love with them.

So presence is more important than perfection. Be genuinely interested in the life of these friends, before you try to interest them in your pursuits. Listen. Ask open-ended questions. Reserve judgment. Invest. Lean into their concerns. Don't have an agenda except for God's agenda. Have the patience to see what God will do.

And then be ready for whatever happens.

One of my neighbors, Lorenzo, who is a follower of Jesus, was thinking of moving away from our community when a piercing question came into his mind. He believed it came from Jesus. Are you going to move before ever investing in your neighbors?

Tears came to Lorenzo's eyes as he realized he'd lived in his neighborhood for years but rarely reached out to his neighbors with God's love. Within the next two weeks, he and his wife, Kassie, were intentional in sharing God's love in natural ways. They took a meal to a person fighting cancer. They took cookies to a new couple that had recently moved in. They ended up praying for another couple and even got to share their faith in Jesus with another—all because they began living intentionally.

Now they've adopted their neighborhood as the mission field to which God's assigned

them.

The Disciple-making Lifestyle

Some of us have been taught that following Jesus equals going to church on Sunday, as if that is our highest calling. We think discipleship means joining a Bible study group. If we use our spiritual gift in the church, we reach the zenith of spirituality. Or so we've heard.

But the life God wants for us is so much more.

We might learn something from the practice of dieting. In an effort to become healthy, some people will go on a crash diet. Paleo, South Beach, Mediterranean, DASH—you can count calories, add protein, work out, or whatever, and chances are that you will lose weight.

But then what? Will you make long-term changes to your life-style, or will you revert to long-standing patterns? We all know that the best way to stay healthy is to address our lifestyle choices. Eat smaller meals more often. Drink plenty of water. Get adequate sleep. Exercise early and often. Cut back on sugar. There are many who lose twenty pounds on a diet and then put on thirty when they get back to their normal routine—because they've never committed to changing their lifestyle.

Adopting your neighborhood is a lifestyle. It's a mindset. For many believers, it's a paradigm shift. It's not a list of religious things to do; it's a commitment to loving God and loving others in every area of your life. It is spiritually healthy living.

In the next few chapters we discuss this community-creating, neighborhood-adopting lifestyle. We call it "prayer, care and share." You'll see numerous stories, best practices and illustrations, but please don't view them as tactics to learn. Prayer, care and share is a way of living that positions us to be available to God and available to others. It can become as natural as breathing.

Prayer, care and share go together symbiotically. The three elements are not linear, but they wrap around one another, each one feeding into the others and drawing from them. Let's look at each one individually, but we'll be sure to put them back together at the end.

Pray

4.

There is a powerful connection between the first “great” commandment and the second. We need the first to accomplish the second. In this online course, you will hear a lot about loving your neighbor because the second great commandment is often neglected or treated as if it was aspirational.

However, you can’t give away what you don’t have. There was a reason Jesus started with love God before He got to love your neighbor.

The scripture tell us, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Matthew 22:37-39

Loving God is the vertical step. Loving your neighbor is the horizontal reach. Together they form the shape of a cross. The cross reminds us of the sacrifice that is necessary to dethrone self and love genuinely.

Prayer is one of the primary ways we connect with God, so let’s start with prayer and make prayer priority all the way through. Many times I tell people we intentionally put prayer first when we say, live the pray, care, share, and disciple lifestyle.

Let’s think of prayer as simple communication with the Trinity, God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let’s not complicate prayer.

Keep it simple, keep it real and keep it up, says Pete Greig, the Founder of 24/7 Prayer in his book, “How to Pray.”

Always remember that any good conversation involves give and take—talking and listening.

As you pray, think first of His love for you. Realize He loves you as a dearly loved son/daughter. You are someone He’s adopted and accepted as His own. He longs to be in a relationship with you, and He is glad you made the time to pray. He is always ready to hear your voice and he could pick it out of a crowd.

Understand that you are loved not because of what you do but because of who’s you are.

Jesus wants to walk with you in an intimate, moment-by-moment relationship. He bought you back, redeeming your life so you could be a friend of the Father. If you could grasp the depth of God’s love, the width of his forgiveness, and the good thoughts he has for you—you would be blown away!

Our hearts can't comprehend the truth that we are the beloved of God or, as the psalmist says, "the apple of his eye." He chose us even while we were in sin, and Jesus endured unspeakable suffering to save us. Jesus has forgiveness for our sin and grace for our shame.

God is for you, not against you. His thoughts toward you are always loving and kind. Even if there are discipline and correction in your future, it is out of love. Jesus desires to set you free from the bondage of sin. It is for the freedom you are set free. Now that is good news!

The One Thing

David, the psalmist, was a shepherd in his younger years. No doubt, he had lots of time to think and pray out on the hillside. In Psalm 27:4, David said, *One thing I have asked of the Lord; this is what I desire, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.*

Perhaps it was because David prioritized prayer and made it the one thing that he was able to do so many other things well. Let's insure that the same could be said of you.

If there is just one thing you have time to do in a given situation, make it prayer. Let time with God become your delight. You don't even have to use words.

Think about time with those you love. Do you have to create some elaborate, contrived, way of greeting? Are your conversations with good friends mechanical? I'm guessing you don't rush in, ask for something and rush out of your conversations. I doubt if you would like for your children to treat you like an ATM machine so make time for unhurried and unstructured time with God.

Let yourself relax in God's presence, knowing that it brings joy to His heart that You are present. Then imagine that He is with you throughout your day—because He is. At that point, just naturally start talking to him out loud or under your breath. It doesn't matter. He can even hear your thoughts.

Occasionally pause to listen; still your anxious soul. Pray for open ears to the Spirit. Mix in the Word of God or listen to a worship song. Before long, you'll be sensing the presence of God and interacting with him—you are called to this kind of relationship with Jesus. Enjoy it and return to it often.

Praying The Scriptures

If you haven't explored the way God loves, spend the next month or so in the Scriptures,

deepening your understanding of who God is and what God does. Then let that growing knowledge fuel your love for God. As I dig into the Word, I often pray, God, I want to know you better and love you more.

Take time daily in God's Word, the Bible. I read slowly and often spend time reviewing verses or paragraphs multiple times. This quiet, private, time with God is a great way to start your day. Usually, I sit quietly in a listening posture. Sometimes I close my eyes to block out anything that would interfere. Then I roll the Scripture through my mind, slowing taking in its truth and praying that God would integrate it into my soul.

I often journal about how a particular Bible passage relates to my life, considering not only what it says to me but also what I should do with it. I invite the Holy Spirit to enter into this exercise to lead me. Daily I ask the Lord to cleanse me and to filter out anything selfish or sinful.

One of my favorite ways to use Scripture is to pray it back to God, inserting my life and its situations into the verses. When I do this, it feels like I'm talking to God with divinely inspired direction.

Most mornings, I listen to a worship song or two on YouTube and sing along. Praise is an excellent response to the challenges of my day. When I express dependence toward God, hope fills my heart. I often sense the Spirit is near, filling my soul with love. These times in the morning give me a kingdom perspective for the rest of my day.

We take time daily to fill our bodies with food. Shouldn't we daily feed our soul?

This Is How To Pray

The one thing the disciples asked Jesus to teach them was to pray. This is significant because of the many other things they evidently placed lower on the priority list. Check out how Jesus taught his disciples to pray in what we call "The Lord's Prayer." Pray like this:

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,*

but rescue us from the evil one. -Matthew 6:9-13 NLT

This prayer is intended as a guide for us. You could think of it as an outline. It is not intended to be the whole of prayer but it is a great place to start. Each phrase can be a new subject of prayer.

Jesus started with praise and moved to a kingdom focus. He prayed for daily needs. Jesus reminds us to pray for cleansing and right standing with God and others. He finishes by praying for victory.

Think about your prayers. Are they well rounded? Do you make room for praise daily? Is there a kingdom focus, or do you only ask for your needs to be met? Do you pray for victory over temptation and rescue from sin?

What if you set out to pray like Jesus? How would that change how you think about prayer?

When you pray, *your kingdom come*, pause and invite Jesus to show you where He is already at work and join Him there.

And when you close your prayer time be sure to finish with praise for the coming victory. Yours Lord, is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever! Amen!

Pray For Your Neighbors By Name

Years ago, Chris Cooper, the Founder of blesseveryhome.com, encouraged me to pray for my neighbors by name and to become a Light to my neighborhood. I took his challenge to heart, and God took me up on my prayers. You can join in by going to lovekc.net/bless-every-home.

I'm a diehard Kansas University Jayhawk basketball fan. And I noticed a guy who lived just two houses away who often wore a KU sweatshirt. His name was Keven. We became friends, frequently talking about our team, in each other's driveway. We both had basketball hoops, so we would shoot hoops and talk. I often prayed for Keven and his wife, Robyn.

To save money, our family unplugged from cable TV. That made it difficult for me to keep up with the KU games. When I shared my lament with Keven, he invited me to watch the games at his house. I was glad to accept the invitation.

When KU played its in-state rival, the Kansas State Wildcats, I watched the game with

Keven in his downstairs den. We talked about basketball but also chatted about our families and our jobs. We had a great time. It was even better because Kansas was leading at halftime.

While we grabbed some snacks and drinks, the conversation went more in-depth. Keven had a relative who talked about his faith. Keven wasn't so sure his relative knew what he was talking about and Robyn outright disagreed. Knowing I was a pastor, Keven wanted to check those statements with me. I didn't want to get in the middle of his family's business, so I asked a different question: Do you want to know what the Bible says about the way back to God?

"I sure do," he said.

I started by honestly admitting that I'd wondered about these things for some time. I have peace in my heart today, but only after searching out the truth. I was willing to share my story if there was interest. He was interested.

I shared about the love that Jesus had for him. I told him about the need for Jesus to pay for the sin of this crazy, mixed-up world in which we live. I shared the story of Easter and the resurrection of Jesus.

I told Keven I was living with faith and confidence today, not because of what I've done but because of what Jesus did for me. I explained how I received God's forgiveness and the grace in which I now live. It was simple to start. I acknowledged I went my own way, the Bible calls that sin, and I asked God to forgive me and lead me.

I didn't go fast. I made room for questions. I was a friend telling another friend where to find an oasis of peace and purpose for living. I relaxed, believing this conversation would go wherever Keven and the Spirit wanted. I didn't have a personal agenda, nor did I feel like I had to lead him to a salvation prayer. I was willing to take one step at a time.

He kept asking good questions. I could tell he was seeking. I asked him if it made sense to him. Then I asked him if this kind of faith was something he wanted. He said he did. He said he believed in Jesus. I asked if he was willing to ask Jesus to lead his life and forgive his sins, and he said, yes.

We prayed in his basement that day, and Keven accepted the grace of God. And all of this happened before halftime ended. I don't remember who won the basketball game, but I know Kevin's life changed for eternity. Keven and Robyn have been following Jesus for over a decade now.

I love the way God restores and redeems.

As it turns out, Robyn had been praying for Keven and sharing her faith with him for

some time. All of that came to fruition in the den that day. I just happened to be there at the right time.

Pray for your neighbors by name daily and watch God go to work! When our prayers intertwine with our caring and sharing, God sets divine appointments. So don't be afraid to invite people to Jesus. God may have created that opportunity for you to join him in his redemptive purposes.

Pray Using Blesseveryhome.com

If you haven't yet gone to blesseveryhome.com and created an account now would be a great time! Add your address and a password, and soon a confirmation email will come back to you. Watch for it. If you don't see it within a minute, check your SPAM. Confirm your account info, and you will be a Light!

Daily you will receive five neighbor names for which to pray. The programming walks you around your neighborhood. You can pray from the email, but I prefer to click on the box that says, Go to Map.

Once there, you can click on the circles, and you will see the contact card for your neighbor. If I don't know them, and I'm just praying, I click on "pray." You'll see the color red added to the contact card. If I know them, but I've not yet shared my faith, I click on "care." The color yellow is added.

If I know them, and I've shared my faith, but they haven't yet accepted Jesus, I click on "share." The card will add green.

When you know the person has accepted Jesus click on "disciple." The color blue is added. You will want to connect with other disciples of Jesus to encourage them to become Lights.

You will have a dashboard that shares the results of your pray, care, share, and disciple efforts. I like to see my reds turn to yellow, and my yellows turn to green and so forth until the number of blues increase.

You can also see the other Lights in the neighborhood. Our ultimate goal is to connect with other disciples in the neighborhood to form missional communities who not only serve together but also take time to gather, study the Bible together, pray, and just hang out.

A missional community can combine their efforts to care, and you will hear more about that in an upcoming lesson. It is also good to invite those who are on the journey to

Jesus to the group. You may also want to prayer-walk your neighborhood.

Prayer Walking Your Neighborhood

Jesus and Paul both said to “watch and pray” (Matthew 26:41; Colossians 4:2). This suggests a dual focus. Prayer doesn’t remove us from the world, but equips us to encounter it. We ask God to do his part, and we seek the insight we need to do our part.

One of the best ways I’ve found to “watch and pray” is to walk and pray. Take a stroll around your neighborhood, in conversation with God. Let the walk fuel your prayer, and let the prayer inform your walk.

Prayer-walking is a way of praying onsite with insight.

As you walk and pray, invite God to speak to you about your neighbors. Don’t feel the need to fill up every minute. Make yourself available to God and to your neighbors. Don’t be surprised if, while you are praying, someone comes up and starts a conversation with you. And if you have the chance to be the conversation starter, by all means speak up.

“God Things”

One evening as I passed a particular house, I noticed all sorts of grotesque Halloween decorations. This family took it over the top, I thought. Immediately, in my spirit, I heard what I thought might be a prompting from God to pray for them. I did pray. And even though I didn’t know the family or anything about their spiritual condition, I continued to pray for them each time I passed that home, and at other times as well. Weeks passed.

Late one Friday afternoon, a person I didn’t know dropped by my office. During this season, I was the Pastor at The Indian Creek Community Church. The lady wanted to talk to a pastor, and, somehow, she found her way to my office.

Did I have time to talk, was the question. I was trying to wrap up my work and head home, but I’ve learned to treat seeming intrusions as possible “God things.” And I was curious.

As she shared her story of spiritual need, I realized that she lived in the very house for which I’d been praying. I talked to her about God’s love and how He often works with us in difficult times. She had some familiarity with Christianity, but it had been years since she had connected with God. I asked her if this might be a good time to reach out to God.

She hesitated.

“I think God has been reaching out to you,” I offered. Then I told her that I’d been praying for her for more than a month. As I described my prayer-walks and the Spirit’s prompting, her jaw dropped. She had found her way to my office, wondering what to do next! She could have chosen any pastor in Olathe, Kansas, but she found my office. Coincidence? I don’t think so.

Before she left that day, we prayed together. She joined me in confessing her need for God and inviting him to lead her. We both cried, sensing the presence of God and the care of the Good Shepherd, who is continually seeking his lost sheep.

That woman has since become a great friend and faithful prayer partner. And now, each time I walk past her home, I thank God that her house was on my route.

As you make prayer-walking part of your routine, you may encounter “God things” as well. Not every encounter will be this dramatic, but “watch and pray” as you walk and pray. I find it rare that if a person prayer-walks for thirty days, they don’t see something miraculous happen.

Best Practices

Listen to the Spirit as you walk. In grade school, I had a teacher who used to say, Put on your listening ears. I would say the same thing when you prayer-walk.

Keep your eyes open to what is happening in your neighborhood. Where do you see people gathered? Is someone starting a project? Are there signs of neglect somewhere?

As much as possible, pray for your neighbors by name as you walk. Some people carry around blesseveryhome.com on their phone. Others print their names from the “List” version in the toolbar at the blesseveryhome.com website. They then carry the list of names and addresses with them as they walk.

Keep Your Head Up And Your Ears Open.

My friend, Brian Johnson, says, Keep some words in your mind that might prompt you to look behind the scenes. For example, ask yourself about these words: pain, parties, pennies, and power? Do you see anything that relates to those words for which you should pray?

Another friend uses a different set of equally insightful words: hurts, habits, hope, and

history.

Think, who are the “persons of peace” in your neighborhood? They are people with the gift of gathering. They are often the ones who know everyone else in the neighborhood. If you want to entertain friends at your home, they would know how to go about it. They might even offer to be the host. They may become your connection to the whole neighborhood.

Walk at the same time every day, if possible. You are more likely to meet people because you may see them again and again.

In the conversations that arise along the way, be honest and caring. People will sense what you’re about. Don’t preach. Ask questions, as long as any answer is okay. Give them room, and they may open up to you. Give God room, and you will get to see God work in the hearts of your neighbors.

Resources

If you’d like to learn more about prayer-walking check out the Blesseveryhome Prayer-walking Guide.

Prayer-walking

<https://www.sbcv.org/wp-content/uploads/BlessEveryHome-Prayerwalking-Guide.pdf>

You may have a school in your neighborhood. If so take a lap or two around regularly and pray as you go. For even more ideas check out this link:

Prayer for Schools

<https://www.sbcv.org/wp-content/uploads/SBCV-Prayer-for-Schools.pdf>

Listen to The BLESS podcast [“Pray”](#).

Now let’s move forward to the next online lesson, Let Tech Help.

Let Tech Help

5.

Chris Cooper has an amazing vision—lights shining for Christ in every neighborhood in America. He aims to provide the best of technology in support of the prayer/care/share lifestyle.

The Bless Every Home website is his life's work. There you can sign up to pray for your neighbors by name. You can sign up for ten, twenty-five, or even more. You will receive five names in your inbox every day (or whatever days you designate). You can pray from a map or a list.

You can also see where other “lights” are in your neighborhood— other believers who care about reaching others. You can exchange notes and pray together for your friends and neighbors.

Everyone A Hero

I think this was the secret of the book of Acts. Regular people were the heroes. Their lives were changed and they shared their faith. People gathered in each other's homes to talk about life. The Spirit surrounded their efforts, and the common believer was filled with divine thoughts and spiritual energy. People used their gifts and God used their words to transform others.

If every neighborhood had a home where people met to share faith, it would change the perception of faith in our country. We would have lasting change. A movement of God would come that is organic and unstoppable. This is what's happening around the world, why not here?

I've committed myself to Jesus's message and his methods. I want to recover the dynamic of the early disciples' faith and activity.

I want to love God and love people. I want to see God's love poured out in my neighborhood.

Will you join in?

You were made for this. You are uniquely gifted and prepared to be who you are, living where you live, doing what you do. As my friend Rob says, “You don't have to leave your zip code to be on mission for Jesus. You don't have to cross oceans, jungles or deserts.” Yes, you may have to reach a hand across a fence or mow someone's lawn or say a word about Jesus to a needy neighbor in the supermarket, but you can do this.

Let Jesus be the center of your story and share your story with your friends.

Care

6.

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. -Matthew 25:40 NIV

Jesus urged his followers to care for the hungry, the homeless, those who need clothing and those who are sick or in prison. Surprisingly, he suggested that our loving service to these needy people would be a gift to him. This theme bounces through the Scriptures. Love for God means love for others (1 John 4:8).

Love is the highest calling for the Christian. Love is our identifying trait (1 Corinthians 13:13; John 13:35). Love often shows up best in the way we care.

As we care for others, showing them God's love, we often see them open up to a relationship with God. Care builds a bridge over which conversations can cross. Care builds trust, and trust allows people to talk about the things that matter most. As the saying goes, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

People are not looking for a sermon. They are looking for a friend. In most cases, you will only receive the right to speak into someone's life if you've already offered the gift of relationship. Unless you've already connected as a friend people are unlikely to give you the time of day. We have thousands of messages coming at us every day from hundreds of sources. What is the filter that allows a message to get through? I suggest that the filter is a relationship; unless you have a relationship, you have little to no credibility. Care and friendship become the point of connection through which counsel is received. If you don't care; they don't care what you have to say.

Relationship-building

Several years ago, my next-door neighbor broke his foot stepping awkwardly off his steps. When I heard about it, I felt prompted to mow his lawn. He really appreciated it. It made such a big impression that, when his foot was healed and winter came, he used his new snow-blower to clear our driveway multiple times.

I didn't mow his lawn in order to get my driveway cleared. I did it because the Spirit prompted me to show love in this way. I'm sure you've done similar things. The more we follow divine nudges and care for others in little ways, the more the Lord shines his love through us. These little things matter. Being a good neighbor is rarer than you realize. Simple acts of generosity can break through the isolation of our communities and establish real relationships.

Those relationships can be mutually beneficial. My neighbor and I do good things for each other. And as you follow the Spirit's leading to care for others, you might find opportunities to let others care for you. That's what friendships are about.

Look at it this way: When you receive care, it takes you out of a position of power and into a place of dependency. You are no longer in control. Because the other person has willingly chosen to serve you, the relationship grows stronger. As a result, there is often opportunity to talk about the deeper things of life.

Listen For The Voice Of The Spirit

Listen for the Spirit's leading. In your sphere of influence, you'll find many needs, and you can't meet them all. But if you pay attention, God will guide you with laser-like precision to show His love in specific ways to certain people around you.

Do not seek to manipulate people through the care you give or smother them with your attention. Reject having a "messiah complex" where you have to have every answer; this is not about you and your wisdom. You are the hands and feet of Jesus, loving and serving others.

You may argue, I'm not the compassionate type. I'm more Type A, with a "gitter done" mentality. Okay then, when you stop to care—it means 10x more!

People Need To Belong Before They Believe

If you extend your circle of care into someone's life, whether it is a friend, acquaintance, relative, co-worker or neighbor they are more receptive to what you have to say. And don't be proud, you have something to receive from them too. They will absolutely sniff out someone who is self-centered. People know when you act interested but in reality, want a notch in your belt to show that in what you are a witness for Jesus.

My wife, Belinda, specializes in the area of care. If you know her you will say, of course, she's had the title of "Care Pastor" for years. I would say, she has that title for a good reason.

Here are a few of the things I've learned from her.

- Make time for people, don't always be in a hurry keeping your agenda
- Listen beyond the words. Listen for tone of voice
- Watch body language. Their posture may give you a clue if they feel shame
- Note places you could help
- Offer to pray with them and do it on the spot

It is important to realize that people may test you a time or two before they open up. Often they will conceal their true need behind surface needs to see if you will stay engaged. Some of this behavior is unconscious. There may be times they've been burned by trusting someone. They may be cautious. Give them space. Let them be real, even testy, and don't judge their language if it is raw.

Connect at a heart level. Many times the best thing you can do is listen and care.

Resist attempting to fix things and reject clique answers and churchy solutions. Let the tension of a moment hang in the air so you both feel it. Acknowledge the pain of the moment.

Expect that if they open up it might be the slow opening that a flower does. You can't grab flower petals and drag them open without breaking them. But if a flower has warmth and sunshine it will open on its own and turn toward the sun.

The Woman At The Well

Many people read the story of the woman at the well and draw out insight for how to share your faith. It absolutely delivers many points worthy of consideration. However, another way to read the story is to watch the way that Jesus cares.

³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[a])

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever

drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶ He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

¹⁷ “I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

In case you ever wonder if care deserves the top billing we give it here in this online discipleship course, consider the words of the brother of Jesus, James.

Faith In Action

James writes in chapter two of his New Testament letter to resist prejudice which is an aspect of care in action. He goes on to say, in the same chapter, that “faith without deeds is dead.”

Let’s read James 2:17, *So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.*

He may be building in this verse on the thought he previously offered at the end of

chapter one, “religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”

James reminds us that care is not simply soft and squishy kind. Care can be an act of justice whereby the followers of Jesus advocate for “kingdom come” values. At times care might look like going after the elimination of sex trafficking. Care might be providing a Christian alternative to orphan care. Care could be advocating for equality in education for any and every child.

As Christians we have the privilege of being the carriers of the Good News message. We know that Jesus is the hope of the world. His words and his ways carry true hope and healing. We dare not be silent when the world desperately needs to know there is salvation in no other name.

The culture has attempted to claim the dominant narrative and as a result many followers of Jesus are back on their heels. I often hear Christians say, I just don’t know what to say. This is one of the primary reasons why I started Love KC.

My rally cry for Love KC is we exist to help Christians live their faith with confidence and know what to say to their friends.

When we have opportunity to speak up for Jesus, and the lives of others are on the line, we should not hesitate to speak up but let us do it with respect. Jesus said to his disciples, be as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves. In other words, choose your words carefully and let the Spirit direct you.

Remember that the battle we fight is with a world system stained with sin and led by an adversary in revolt against all that is just, right and true. If the enemy had the audacity to rebel against Jesus—and he still fights as if he could win at any moment—we must resist with strength and determination while remaining inside the Spirit’s leading.

The apostle Paul said it well, our battle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. See Ephesians 6:12.

To connect the first part of this lesson with the second part we must exercise care for the people involved at the same time that we stand in the truth that Jesus said in John 10:10, “I have come that you might have life and have it to the full.”

Care is required to be a witness for Jesus in today’s world. It is the connecting piece between prayer and share. If you pray, God will reveal ways to care. As you care, you will have opportunity to share. The pray, care, share and disciple lifestyle is what leads to discipleship. It is the ‘Jesus life’ in action.

Listen to The BLESS podcast [“Care”](#).

The B.L.E.S.S. Rhythms

7.

In our online discipleship course, we teach a Pray, Care, Share, and Disciple pathway to living your faith with confidence and knowing what to say to your friends about Jesus. The verb “share” is prominent in the Love KC steps and is also a part of the B.L.E.S.S. Rhythms.

What are the B.L.E.S.S. Rhythms? We designed a whole podcast around the idea that we are equipped by the Spirit to live a lifestyle that brings blessing to the world around us. If we use the word bless as an acrostic, we can better remember the elements that make up being a blessing.

But before we go to the letters and what they stand for, let’s remember that we are created in the image of God, who is, by nature, a blessing God! It is His desire that His children would know He’s good and that He is FOR us.

The first lesson in this online discipleship course is titled, ‘It’s All About Love.’ One of the things that sets God apart from all other contenders for that title is His fierce desire to bless His children. The God that the people of Israel knew as, “Yahweh,” and that we know as our Heavenly Father, is not only a Creator and our Sustainer, but He is Savior, Healer, and Helper.

The story we find ourselves in is that over time, even with the goodness of God and His blessing in our life, we still go our own selfish way. Inevitably, we seem to find our way to a path that is self-serving. We try to find life apart from God.

But when we do, God doesn’t manipulate us or control us when we sin. In fact, He loves us so much that He sent Jesus to the cross to pay for our sins. The story of the prodigal son depicts God as the waiting Father running with open arms to welcome us home.

We won’t find any other ‘home’ in any other family that’s better than the family of God. I call this God’s blessing. This is God’s blessing to His people. He’s for us and not against us. His ways are good, right, and true. In Him, we find that life and salvation are found in no other name than the name of Jesus.

We now get the privilege of extending this blessing that we’re receiving into the life of others. In this lesson, we talk about how to develop a rhythm of life that’s as natural as breathing. We want it to be natural for us to receive God’s blessings and then pass them on to others.

In Genesis 12:1-3, the Lord said to Abraham, *Leave your country, your relatives, your Father’s home and go to a land that I’m going to show you. I will give you many descendants;*

they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse those who curse you. Through you, I will bless all the nations.

Abraham was probably the greatest, most prosperous, blessed man of his day. God's word to him was clear. He was blessed to be a blessing. He wasn't gifted by God to hoard God's goodness, but to be a source of blessing to others.

When blessings flow to you, do they stop with you? Or do you pass them on? Are you more like a lake or a stream?

Let's not live with a scarcity mindset but with the confidence of abundance because of Who we serve.

God, in His goodness to us on earth, has given us everything we need for life. A good loving father would do that for his kids, but part of God's expectation would be that we would share the resources we have.

Maybe when we look around, and we see places where there's lack in the world—it's not that God hasn't been good—it could be that we, His kids, haven't shared. God wants us to co-create with Him. He created the world, but then He's given us a part to play.

Sharing resources that we need for human flourishing are already here on this earth. We have the responsibility to redistribute them. No one country has all that they need, but if we share, everybody could have enough.

My experience says that I tend toward independence in my life. My wife would tell you that. But when I listen to God, I keep hearing that the higher calling for my life is interdependence. We need each other.

It isn't just Abraham that's blessed to be a blessing; it's you and me. There's a biblical principle at work in the Scripture. When we receive it and pass it on, we actually make room for more. In so doing, we're twice blessed. We receive, and then we're blessed when we give. Giving blessings becomes a cycle that eventually comes back to us. If we stop blessing, we don't make room for more. The blessing could stop for us, too. The well of God's goodness in our life could actually dry up.

The story of Abraham's life is an example for us. Abraham gave his nephew Lot the choice to choose where he would live. Lot chose the best for himself, only to later lose the land. God continued to bless Abraham for his generosity and more than made it up to him.

Abraham let other shepherds have wells that were in dispute. But despite his generosity,

God continued to prosper Abraham and give him more. You can't out-give God.

Now let's apply this thinking to where we live, work, study, and play. God places you near neighbors, co-workers, friends and relatives. No doubt, God's blessed you in numerous ways. If you hold on to what he's given you tightly with tightly clenched hands, your hands won't be open to receive more. But as you open your hands and give, they'll already be open to receive again from God.

Proverbs 11:25 says, Whoever brings blessing will be enriched; the one who waters will himself be watered.

A good way to start every day is to breathe a prayer of gratitude to God for His blessing. Then pray again for God to show you how to be a blessing to those around you.

Start with what is in front of you. You can begin speaking kind words when you walk through your neighborhood or down the hallways at work. You could volunteer at your local grade school. No doubt they could use a mentor, or someone to read to a class, someone to provide security as students start or leave school.

We can share food. There are food pantries that would love to have regular contributions. When we buy groceries, it might be a good idea to think about things we could buy to give away.

We can ask neighbors or co-workers if there is anything for which we could pray. Even looking someone in the eye and listening is a gift. It's amazing how the act of not being in a hurry can bless someone.

Next time you see the letters, B.L.E.S.S. think, I am blessed to be a blessing.

An acrostic is a word where each individual letter identifies a new thought. The beginning letters of a word remind us through a word or a phrase closely linked to the thought. With that in mind, we're going to look today at what the acrostic BLESS means.

Let's think about it this way:

B = Begin with prayer

L = Listen to God and others

E = Eat together

S = Serve others

S = Share, your influence, your story, and the story of Jesus

If you practice one of these was rhythms every day, you'll not only look more like Jesus, but you'll probably help others find Jesus too.

Begin With Prayer

Prayer is the priority. Prayer is the place to start. Let's pray for our friends, neighbors, relatives, and co-workers. It is good to do that early in the day. Then as we see people throughout the day, we can breathe a prayer for them when we're in the same space with them.

A simple prayer might be, God, help this person to have more spiritual curiosity or help this person to know you better or to love you more. Maybe the person you sit with in an Uber or a plane might not know God. Since you don't know, before you start talking to them, you could say, 'God, queue up a little bit of spiritual interest in this person and bless them.'

You can also pray for people to experience God's presence and love. We all have pain points. It may be that when we see a person looking preoccupied, they might be trying to solve some problem in their world. Pray that God would break in and bless them with peace, wisdom, or hope. In this way, prayer is as natural to the believer as breathing.

We're breathing God's love in, and then we breathe it out—looking to bless someone.

A way to hold ourselves accountable to pray for our neighbors is to pray using blesseveryhome.com. I set aside time nearly every day to pray for the daily five neighbor names I receive via email. When you go to blesseveryhome.com and sign up, you set up a username and password. You'll get a confirmation email that comes back to you. When you enter your address, you'll then receive five of your neighbor names every day for which to pray. You can also see where they live on the map of your neighborhood.

Listen

The second letter in the word BLESS is "L." We learn to listen—listen to God and others. There's a rhythm here. We listen, and we bless. We listen again and bless again. We'll repeat that word rhythm multiple times today that we pray to God for help.

Breathe in the breath of the Holy Spirit to fill you and breathe out to invite the Holy Spirit to breathe out His blessing on others. We listen to God, to quiet the noise of our life. We invite Him to speak, so we will know what to say when it is our turn to talk. A good prayer might be 'God, how do you want to bless the world today? Help me to listen to and discover the needs of others and where You're at work.' Then be quiet and let God's thoughts flow into your mind and heart because God will answer you.

He tells us, in James, chapter one, that if we need wisdom, to ask and He'll give it to us. You won't always hear an audible voice, but in faith, you can believe that the promptings

or the thoughts that come to your mind next are from God.

Do test them by repeating them to God and asking, 'Is this you God?' Check them against Scripture for a biblical reference. Tell God you want to hear from Him and then sit quietly. Even if you don't have a God-led thought, then it might be that later in the day, you get a thought that is direction from God.

Listening is important with people too. Before you can help others find Jesus, you need to listen to them first. Listen for their hopes, dreams, pains, and challenges. In the trials of life, there is also opportunity to support and give hope.

Listen to what is happening in the world around you. When you hear an ambulance go by, allow the sound of the siren to prompt you to pray for the people involved. If you are with others, you might even say, let's pray for those people right now.

When you listen to the news, you can pray. Those are real people on the other side of the story.

My wife, Belinda, and I go to Westside Family Church in Lenexa, Kansas. When we started attending, Dan Sutherland was the pastor. One night, Dan was watching the local news and saw tragic news. A church building had burned down. It was one of the lead stories.

Dan could have just said, 'Oh, that's really sad,' but he began to pray for the people involved. He didn't know them personally, but he just began to pray for the names. Then he felt like God told him to find them and contact them to offer support. The next day, with some help from the staff, he was able to find the pastor. He reached out to them and invited the pastor and his staff to come over to Westside.

Dan met with them, and the first thing he did was offer them some very tangible financial help. The other thing he offered that might have been worth more, in the long run, was that he would mentor his staff because he obviously knew they didn't have to relocate and do several things. Dan's heart is for church planters, and in a real sense, they were going to start over and plant in a new part of town.

There are needs and opportunities everywhere if we just have our ears and eyes open. The word, love, begins with the letter "l," and so does listening. We could every say, love begins with listening.

Eat Together

Eating together is one of the fastest ways to move a relationship from acquaintance to friendship. In fact, you could say it's almost like the first thing people do. Think about

dating, for example. If people are talking, they're going to want to spend a little more time together. Usually, it's going to involve a drink together, or it's going to involve a meal together. It's easier to hang out if you have something in your hand, like food or drink.

What if you became strategic in the way you shared your meals, could you invest one or two a week in reaching someone who needs to take a step closer to Jesus? We plan most other things, why not plan your social calendar to include sharing your faith?

Many times in Scripture, we see Jesus using a mealtime to teach. The Last Supper is a time many people would remember, but when you look at how Jesus used his time, you would conclude Jesus was very strategic about food and drink.

Let's think about this: There was a breakfast where Jesus cast vision for the disciples after His resurrection. There's the meal with Simon at the Pharisees home, where He taught about humility. Who could forget about the feeding of the 5000?

What about inviting a neighbor family over for a meal every other week? Seasonally you could invite your whole neighborhood over.

One of my good friends, Matt Adams, lives on a cul-de-sac. Several times a year or so is, he walks around, talks his neighbors and says, 'Hey, how about this next weekend: Let's all bring some soup (assuming it is fall) over to our house. Bring whatever you want, and we'll just share it. You don't have to stay long. There's no program; we'll just plan to connect with each other and spend a little time together.' He said he's always amazed if he gives people a week or two in advance, they almost always take him up on it. It builds good relationships for the time you need to have a deeper discussion.

You can also find those natural opportunities, like sitting by someone in the break room where a lot of times people sit alone. Some restaurants have a community table. You could intentionally sit there and get to know the others at the table. One family moved their grill to the front of their home and served neighbors from their driveway. Another put a picnic table in their front yard and on Saturdays shared pancakes. Once you start using your imagination, you can think of ways on your own.

Serve Others

There are two S's in bless. The first one stands for Serve. Serving often has a double benefit because when you begin to serve others, they will often want to reciprocate and serve you. Welcome that. For example, if you're going to buy someone's coffee, you could say, 'Hey, I'll get this one, and you can get the next.' It suggests that you'll do this again. The second meeting is already prompted.

Keep our eyes open to the needs around you. It's okay to be super simple. My wife, Belinda, might be the best person I know in doing this. She is very spontaneous. If she is preparing soup, she will almost always think of someone with whom she could share. When she makes brownies she'll say, I'm going to double the recipe and share them with...and she will name a friend or neighbor.

We should admit here that when it comes to serving, it is more natural for some than for others. We could say the same about the other subjects in the BLESS acrostic. When it doesn't come naturally, we can compensate by planning and preparation. We find ways to do what is important to us, so let's go to our calendar and prepare to serve.

Share

The apostle Peter wrote this about sharing, *Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy.* That's The Message version of 1 Peter 3:15.

You have options here: You can share your story; you can share someone else's story and/or you can share the story of Jesus. The first two should lead to the third. I suggest bite-size pieces and watch their body language to see if they are leaning in or checking out.

We typically have about one-minute increments of time with people unless they engage the conversation. Say less and ask more questions. I try to find ways to share my story that might parallel the other person to get them thinking like Jesus did with the woman at the well.

I think about our present life situation. For example, you could choose the season of the year. Maybe it's getting into the Christmas season, so you say something like, 'Hey, you know, Christmas is coming. I'm excited about it. How about you?' Now you have common ground.

Perhaps they say, 'I'm a little uptight with all the things that have to be done.' 'Me too,' you respond. Then you say something like, 'When I get that way, I have a go-to plan, do you want to hear it?' Wait for their response. If they say yes, you can say, 'I usually just have to like talk to myself and say, "Back up, breathe deeply, think and remember the reason for the season. Maybe it is less about gifts, and parties and running around like a Christmas elf and more about making more room for God.'" Then smile. Be quiet and wait for their response.

If you get a 'tell-me-more' look or response move forward. You could add, 'Jesus came to

a busy world with a message of peace. Do you want to hear more?’

That is just one example of finding middle ground and inviting them into it. If they say, ‘I’m busy’ or ‘I need to go,’ you can say, ‘I’m up for the conversation if you want to talk later.’ They may say, ‘Yeah, maybe later.’ That gives you the opportunity to bring up the conversation again.

You might start that conversation with, ‘The other day, I shared a little about my faith. Do you ever think about spiritual things?’ Most likely, they do think about spiritual things, but they don’t know if you are safe. You can reassure them by saying, ‘I know most people do think about spiritual things, but I also know most people don’t want an uninvited sermon. So if you want a conversation, I’m in on that.’ Leave it with them.

It is the Holy Spirit’s role to convict the person. They are accountable to Him, not you. Your role is to be available and ready for the conversation. Don’t put pressure on yourself or on the other person. Open the door for the Spirit to work and see what happens. Don’t be afraid of where it may go. The Spirit will help you, guide you, and give you words to say.

I talk to waiters and waitresses. When they come to the table, they will almost always introduce themselves. I attempt to make this personal from the beginning. I don’t want to be just another table in their day. I want them to know I see them as a real person, not just a servant.

I find a way to make small talk and get a laugh, if possible. Then they leave to go get our drinks. Usually, when they return, they have an expectation that we will talk some more. I let them do their job taking our order, but I will again try to engage them. What do you like best on the menu? What seems to be the most popular item? If they have a tattoo, I ask them what it means. You are going to see this person multiple times, so work on building a relationship.

Once they serve the food, you could say, “This looks awesome. Thank you for your service. Before we eat our meal, we take time to pray and thank God for the food. I’d like to include you in our prayer. Is there anything we can pray for today?’ Then keep your mouth shut long enough for them to answer. They may be in shock.

Eventually, they will say something. They may say, ‘Yes, that’s nice.’ They will share something usually at the surface level.” Other times they will say, ‘Do you mean you want me to stand here while you pray?’ You can say, “You are certainly welcome, but that’s not a requirement,” and laugh to ease the awkwardness.

Then add, “Whether you stay or not, I think God wants you to know He loves you and that He sees you.”

At this point, the door is open for the Spirit to work. They may excuse themselves, and you simply include a prayer of blessing for them in your prayer for the food. Multiple times I've had a waiter or waitress lean into a conversation or tear up. Sometimes they just say, 'I don't want to talk about it, but thank you.' Every once in awhile, they will say, 'This is just what I needed today.'

Tell God you are available for Him to use and let others know. You'll start having more God conversations.

The Three Circles

There are many Gospel plans from which to choose. It's good to be familiar with several. The one I find that works in many situations is called Three Circles. Here is one version on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/5W8ynRMr59k>

The thing I like best about the Three Circle approach is the ability to start at either the first or the second circle. If you want to start with the good news of God's promise, start with circle number one. If you want to lean into why we are in such a tough state in the world, start with circle number two.

The first circle is the circle of promise. I draw the circle on a piece of paper and talk about how that at the beginning, God's love for us was revealed in His giving us (mankind) a paradise. There was a great promise that God loves his people and that God wants to be with His people.

I emphasize God's plan for us is good. The best part is He desires to be present and available to us.

Because I'm usually telling the whole thing in a minute's time, I don't park a long time on any one of these. But I say, 'In this promise, God really wanted us to develop a relationship with Him, but that inevitably gets swallowed by our own sinfulness because we all bring our selfishness and sinfulness into it.'

Problem

Man didn't know God very well at the beginning. Adam and Eve misunderstand God and trusted their own logic and will. That choice to go their own way carried the penalty of separation from God. All of us are born with the default to sin and go our own way. This was the consequence of man's choice, not God's choice.

In the second circle, the Bible says that even the earth is cursed. We live on a sin-

stained planet because God told Adam and Eve if they went their own way, the consequence is death—separation from God, and eventually, every person will die. We are now experiencing that downward spiral of sin, death, selfishness, and life on a sin-stained planet.

If you've wondered why things are so challenging down here, and if you've ever said, 'It shouldn't be this way.' God would agree. He didn't cause it. In fact, He warned against it. This is the consequence of sin. God didn't want that for us. From that day forward, he set out to give us an alternative.

God's for us, not against us, but He loved us too much to force us to love Him and choose Him.

Once we are in the second circle, we feel distance from God. We feel distance from others, usually sometimes even feel shame within ourselves. This is kind of sounds like a negative story, but it has a good ending here that God has already prepared for this.

Redemption

God knew that if He gave us free will, we would reject Him. He knew that He needed to give us a chance, and that man would go his own way, but in that, he would discover His need for God.

So the second circle of problem leads us to a third circle we call "redemption." Here we have God doing for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. God prepared for our failure in advance by sending His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins.

God, the Father, prepared a way back to relationship, forgiveness and life. The third story then is a story of redemption. God takes what the enemy meant for harm and creates a way back. Through the payment of Jesus for the sin of the world, each of us have a chance to make our own choice. We can choose to trust and follow God. When we do, we're forgiven. Relationship is restored. We are adopted into the family of God, granted grace for this life and invited into eternal life with God.

When we take God up on His offer, our life has redemption. God takes on, with us, the difficult things and the hard things. He brings something good out of them and restores us unto to his original plan where we can walk with him in community.

The Comeback Story

Wherever you are today, you are not at the end of your story. You may need a turnaround. Everyone loves a good comeback story. You're invited into a new season of

life where you're connected with God and His promise.

You can have the promise of the first circle today if you trust God and follow His plan for your life. Connect with God in the second circle. Acknowledge you've gone your own way and are experiencing the consequences of that choice. Receive the gift of Jesus' death on your behalf, and invite God to forgive you and lead you. Step into His redemption story and make it your story.

I invite people out of the problem and into the story of redemption.

You may use any of a number of Gospel presentations as they all end up in this place where you offer a person re-connection with God. When you do, just be quiet and let them speak next. If they have questions, give short answers and keep the focus on what they will do with what they've heard.

Ask them if they feel God drawing them. If they feel a struggle, tell them it's the same struggle we all feel with our flesh that wants to stay in control. Our staying in control, our sin, got us into a tough place—a place we can't get out of on our own.

Ask them if they want to pray. Offer to lead them in a prayer of surrender. They can pray their own words out loud. You will just give them a path on which to walk. Go slowly and let the Holy Spirit deal with their heart. Lead them to Jesus. It's not about you.

Conclusion

Let's review the BLESS rhythms. Let the B – Begin with prayer. L – Listen to God and others. E – Eat with others, intentionally making time for others around food. S – Serve others and allow them to serve us. Finally, the last S is Story. We share our story and then share the story of Jesus.

Listen to The BLESS podcast [“BLESS Rhythms”](#).

How To Share

8.

And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? -Romans 10:14 NLT

Eugene lived about eight houses up the street. We saw each other at church, but he wanted more of a conversation. He sensed he was missing something, but he didn't know what.

We scheduled lunch.

As we talked about our families, he mentioned his wife's faith. He saw a vibrancy there that was attractive. He was also intrigued by what he saw in me, but he had doubts about God. The personal nature of his faith seemed to be missing. He considered making a commitment, but he wasn't sure he should. What if the others around him were just manufacturing their feelings and fooling themselves?

We were meeting at Zio's, an Italian restaurant, known for its lasagna. We talked for a long time, long after the dishes were cleared away. I decided it might help if I asked some questions. Had he ever asked Jesus to forgive him and lead him? He said no. Did he ever pray? He said sometimes, but he wasn't sure it went anywhere. Did he want to know the path that led to God, as the Bible described it? He said he did.

Zio's is also known for the brown paper that covers its tables. They give you a couple of crayons when you sit down. I grabbed one and drew a picture: God on one side, humans on the other, with a gaping cavern in between called sin. Then I drew a bridge in the shape of the cross. "Jesus is the bridge," I explained.

I went on: "Jesus came to earth to lead us back to the Father. To complete his mission, he took on our sin and died on the cross to satisfy the penalty of sin. Because the life inside him was greater than the power of sin, death and the devil, death could not hold him and he rose from the dead. Now he offers us his victory."

After a pause, I asked, "Is this something you want?"

He wasn't sure.

I gave him the crayon and asked, "If you were to put yourself on this diagram, where would you be?"

He thought for a time and said, "I'd be right here," marking a place on the bridge but not across it. "I think I believe in Jesus, but I have a lot of doubts about so many things."

“Doubts don’t discourage God,” I said. “He doesn’t think any less of you because you doubt. Doubts are the starting place for most of us.” I shared some of the doubts I’d had and offered to talk through Eugene’s issues with him. “I’m interested and I’ll walk with you, but I have another question for you. Is any one of those doubts big enough to keep you from the love that Jesus has for you, if this is true?”

Eugene was clearly thinking about this, so I went on: “I’m going to ask you to doubt your doubts. What if your doubts are deceiving you? What if the story of Jesus is true? What are you missing out on? You know, whatever you believe, it is going to require faith. You can have faith in your doubts or you can have faith in Jesus. So I guess my ultimate question is, ‘Do you want to live the rest of your life doubting or would you rather place your faith in Jesus and receive his love?’”

I let the question hang in the air. The silence seemed endless, but I was determined not to answer for him. I would be with him no matter what he answered. Either answer was a further piece of clarity for his spiritual journey.

Finally he said, “I want to receive Jesus. We can talk about my doubts later.”

We prayed right there at the table with the crayon drawings on brown paper, and Eugene began a personal relationship with Jesus. The light came on in his eyes when he invited Jesus to lead him. His smile was big and real. He could hardly wait to tell his wife. Later, it was my privilege to lead a small community group in his home. I got to watch him grow and claim his faith. He grew daily as a disciple. The funny thing about his doubts is that they didn’t seem so big anymore, and we never had to talk about them.

How To Share

Jesus told his disciples they were salt and light in their world. Everywhere we go, we bring light and flavor to our world. It’s as if the world has the sin virus and we have the antidote. Will you share it? We can’t relegate sharing the Good News to the pastor, a TV evangelist, or grandma. If our world is going to find Jesus, we each have a role to play.

Here are some tips about sharing with those who need to hear:

- Be open and transparent about your failings and your seek-ing. You don’t have to have it all together.
- Aim at a dialog. I think about these life-giving conversations like tennis. If the other person stops sending the conversation back, stop talking.
- Be a good listener. Be interested before you attempt to be interesting. Don’t rush.
- Ask good, open-ended questions. If you want to be better at sharing your faith, spend time preparing good questions.

- Look for a moment of illumination. Trust that the Spirit is working within the other person. See how the other person might be moving from A to B in their spiritual journey.
- Don't feel like you have to fill up every empty moment. Let God work in the silence.
- Embrace awkwardness with grace. There is no way to avoid awkwardness. It will happen; expect it. Don't feel you are failing. Smile, relax, God is in control, so you don't have to be.

Remember you are introducing one good friend to another good friend. And you are certain that, once they know each other, they will love the relationship.

It may sound contradictory to say, after providing all these tips, but there is no formula to this. Let the Spirit lead you.

Leading To Prayer

When we share with someone, what exactly are we sharing? The gospel, the good news that God loves this person and longs for a relationship with him or her. It makes sense to begin that relationship with a conversation—a prayer. So often, after I've shared with people and I sense they're responding well, I ask if they'd like to talk with God about it.

Since many haven't prayed in a long time, if ever, I try to help them realize that talking with God can be simple and natural. You can use three of the first words every child learns to say.

Sorry

I'm sorry, I'm sorry I sinned. I realize I need a Savior. I can't save myself.

Thank You

Thank you for loving me from the beginning. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin. Thank you for offering me forgiveness. I receive it.

Please

Please lead my life in the way you want me to go. Help me be the person you want me to be.

If they are afraid they will say it wrong, I offer to say it one line at a time and ask them to pray after me. If this is acceptable, I always clarify that God already knows what's in their heart, but it often helps us to put it into words. Often I add, "Make this your prayer. Don't say anything you don't mean. If at any point you want to go off on your own, that would be great."

Don't feel you need to pray a scripted prayer. If they don't want to pray out loud, don't force it. Let it be personal and real for them.

Think of coming to Jesus more like a spiritual journey than a one-time event. People usually take baby steps. If your presence with them is that of a friend, they are more open to your spiritual guidance. People fear a salesman, but they love the shelter of a friend.

Use Scripture to give them assurance of God's favor and forgiveness. Have verses like 1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:16; Romans 10:9; and Psalm 103:8-14 at the ready.

After someone makes a decision to follow Christ, stay in touch. Be available personally to provide guidance or answer questions, but also try to connect the person with a small group and a church. Be aware that these are baby steps as well. Someone who has made a personal commitment of faith might still balk at joining a larger group, but continue to surround that person with prayer and care as they grow.

Listen to The BLESS podcast ["How To Share"](#).

Disciple

9.

Is the fruit of an apple another apple? That seems like a reasonable answer, but the better answer is that the fruit of an apple is an apple tree. You're probably wondering what this has to do with disciple-making.

Is the fruit of a disciple another disciple—you're on to me by now, right? The fruit of a disciple is a disciple-maker. Disciples share their faith. Disciples lead their friends to Jesus, but they don't stop there. Disciples lead their friends to become disciples who make disciples.

I've been to China and India multiple times and in those trips my friends have made it clear to me that they believe Americans think discipleship is going to a small group, completing a course at church or doing deep study. While these can all be good things my friends posed this question to me in a friendly but challenging tone of voice, should we consider someone a disciple who doesn't make disciples who make disciples? They are specifically looking for reproduction. They don't want anyone Christian to be the end of the chain. They think Christianity should grow and reproduce until we reach the whole world or Jesus comes. In one case, an Indian leader specifically doesn't baptize a new believer until they've led at least 25 people to Jesus and was discipling them to disciple others.

That's a challenging way to think about what we are called to do. Do you think that is cultural or is it biblical or both?

Let's See What Jesus Said

Jesus said, in Matthew 4:19, when He called His disciples, *Come follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people*. Should we call a believer a disciple if he or she doesn't fish for men or women?

All too often we've made sharing our faith, sometimes called evangelism, optional when Jesus made it mandatory. This is what disciples do—they pray, care, share and disciple. Disciples fish for people to make more disciples.

As a pastor I would have people come to me saying, I want something deeper. I would ask, what is deep? They would usually respond with things like, I want to do verse by verse Bible study. Or they might say, I'd like to know the meaning of the Greek or Hebrew words. I'd like to know the culture and context of the scriptures. I would say, you can do that. There's no reason you can't buy a Bible with great notes, maps, timelines, red letters and a great smelling leather cover. Go for it!

I often asked this question: do you think that is deeper?

They would usually say, what do you think is deeper? My answer was, deeper is obedience to Jesus. I believe in obedience-based discipleship. I don't care what you know if you don't obey. Jesus called us to be disciples not just believers.

The best definition of a disciple is one who replicates the life of his or her rabbi. I'm not against study or sitting in a classroom or even in a small group circle unless we allow that to replace the call to reach out to our friends, neighbors, relatives, co-workers and associates. Discipleship isn't an either—or, it is a both—and!

The Great Commission

Just before Jesus returned to heaven, he gave us what we've come to call, The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20). You probably know it by heart, *Go make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.*

All means all. We don't get to pick and choose which commands we will obey like we would choose some foods but not another from a smorgasbord.

Many believers think that they don't have the spiritual gift of evangelism, so they are off the hook when it comes to sharing their faith with their friends. I remind them, there isn't a gift of evangelism, that is everyone's responsibility. There is a gift of an evangelist who tells others of God's Good News as a role paid or unpaid. We are all called to evangelize.

It helps me to break down the meaning of the word evangelize to its' Greek roots. See, I can be deep! The Greek word for evangelism is "euangelion" Literally it means the bearer of good news. Sometimes you will even see the words, good news, capitalized because the good news refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, we also get our word, angel, from this word which means one who bears good tidings. The angels who appeared to the shepherds to tell of Jesus birth were heavenly messengers. And whenever you share the Good News you too are an angel! The people who lived during the time when the book of Acts was written called the followers of Jesus, "little Christs" or as we have come to translate that statement, Christ ones, or Christians.

Are You Like Christ?

Are you like Christ? Do people see Him through you? Do you follow both His message and His methods?

You may think I'm laying it on a bit thick but please hear me out. I think we could both agree that what we need is Jesus in our world. He's chosen to show up through His people, through you and me. But the mission fails if we fail to follow Him and do what He did. If Jesus says, fish for men but we don't fish should we be called a disciple? Would you call a person a fisherman if they never went fishing?

Should we call a person a disciple if they don't take part in making more disciples who will in turn make more disciples?

We want to be called a disciple, but we don't want to replicate the life of our Master. We put Him in a different category. We say, He was divine—I'm not. But the whole reason He came to earth was to identify with us and to show us that we can do what He calls us to do.

You may be wondering by now, where's the good news? This seems demanding or legalist in the way it comes across. I think that may come because we haven't been taught the way of love. If we think of sharing our faith as primarily using words, it does seem preachy but if we think of making disciples as sharing love and sharing life it is totally do-able.

If disciple making is anything it is life on life, there's no other way. Disciples are not made in mass with a cookie cutter mold. Disciples are made by someone investing in another person, teaching by loving and living; walking alongside them through the good and the bad.

Love Your Neighbor

Jesus promised us He would be with us and He promised us the Holy Spirit would live through us. The way we live out the Great Commission is to follow the application step of the Great Commandments. The Great Commandments could be summarized like this, love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

I'll often say to a person, tell me your plan for the loving God part. Believers will usually come right back with plans they've already been thinking about, I'm going to read by Bible daily, I'm going to lengthen my prayer life, I'm going to be more consistent in making the worship services and they might even add I'm going to learn to fast this year.

That's great, I reply. And what is your plan for loving your neighbor as yourself (don't forget that last part). They look at me like, I've not been thinking about that—it's the

deer in the headlights look! Sometimes they offer, I'll be kind to my neighbors and if I see someone in need I'll help like the Good Samaritan.

In other words, you don't have a plan. This is all aspirational.

Do you realize what we've just done? Jesus said the law and the prophets could all be summarized into two commandments. He took the ten to two. And since we don't have a plan for loving our neighbor, we took the two and decided just to follow one. I quickly add, I'd like to help you with this.

Pray, Care, Share, And Disciple

One of the reasons why I like blesseveryhome.com as a tool for disciple-making is because it helps us have steps for our strategy of loving our neighbor as our self. We can't do this from a distance we must get up close.

Some people are naturally better at the prayer part or in some cases their season of life or limitations combine to make prayer their A game. That's good but don't stop there. You can also care.

In fact, if you begin to pray regularly for your neighbors God will tee up the ball for you and you will have opportunity to care. If I see my neighbors at the mailbox, I may go check my mail too. Maybe I already went to get the mail that day, but it is a good opportunity to say, how are you doing?

What they say next may be information for my next prayer. Or it may be the opportunity for the next act of caring.

If I see a neighbor walk by walking their dog. I'll often say, Hi, what's your dog's name. I may not know their name either but it's safer starting with the dog. They will usually be glad you asked and stop to talk. You can ask what kind of dog it is and call it by its' name. Often, they'll let you pet the dog. Then you can casually say, as you are petting the dog, I'm not sure we've ever met. My name is Gary—of course you use your own name—but you knew that!

I'll often say, where do you live? I see you walk by here a lot. And the conversation is on. This is how I met Hannah. She walked her dog by our house twice a day for a long time. I went out and met her. That started a multi-year friendship. Soon I would get reports on her travels. Later I learned her husband was ill. Then one day she told me he died. There was an opportunity for care.

And when my wife, Belinda and I cared for Hannah, of course we prayed for her and in

that shared our hope and faith in Jesus. To our surprise and joy, she and her husband were both believers too.

That doesn't feel demanding or like legalism, it feels like love. If you start praying and look for opportunities to care, it will almost always turn into opportunities to share Jesus.

I would agree with the fear about evangelism if I thought that you had to get a sign and stand on the corner that said, Turn or burn! "The end is near" signs don't typically start a conversation. Or even if you thought, I have to share the gospel every time no matter what the occasion, I would sympathize with you being reticent. That wasn't the way of Jesus.

Jesus didn't heal every need he saw. He didn't engage every person He met. On one occasion he "set his face like flint," the King James Version of the Bible says because he was going to Jerusalem and he didn't have time to stop and talk to the Samaritans that time. When we think that we have to force every conversation into telling the Gospel story we are likely not listening to the Holy Spirit. It's funny how some of us almost never share and others talk too much. The key is getting our direction from the Spirit and speak when He says, speak and listen when He says, listen.

I rode in an Uber some time ago and wanted to be open to witness if the Spirit led. I wasn't sure how I would know but I asked for some kind of confirmation in prayer as I got in the car.

The driver introduced himself as "Christian." I introduced myself.

I let some time go by and then I said, "I'm sure your parents gave you your name, but it makes me wonder if you like the name and call yourself a Christian."

He gave a half-laugh and said, "the name is fine, but I don't consider myself a Christian."

Oh, okay, I said. "What do you call yourself?"

He said, "maybe a sort of Christian or used to be Christian."

I'd like to hear more about that, I said. And we were off to the races with a 45-minute talk about what Christians believe and what it means to follow Jesus.

I told him I was a pastor and I have kids his age. I said I was very curious as to what his generation thinks about the faith that people in my generation attempt to pass down. I asked him what he didn't believe and why.

He jumped right in and we had a great discussion. At the end I told him I would be praying for him and asked him what I could pray for. He told me his health which is kind of code for, I really don't want to tell you what is going on. But he thanked me for the conversation and said he enjoyed it. I believe him. It all seemed very sincere and appropriate.

There was nothing hard or contrived about that conversation. It never drugs along or seemed forced. I think this was the kind of conversation Jesus had with the woman at the well.

Sharing your faith happens best when you are tuned in to the people around you and you are tuned into the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we are planting seeds in small ways that someone else will harvest. Other times we are watering the seeds someone has already planted but the person isn't ready to receive. And other times we are the one who gets to harvest when someone else has planted.

Once I was on a mission trip where I stayed up all night. Then our flight was delayed so I couldn't get on the plane and go to sleep like I hoped. To make it worse, I was watching about twenty senior high students. Finally, we got on the plane and all I could think of was getting a whole row to myself and going to sleep.

As I walked to my seat, on a very full plane, I saw a guy who looked at me coming down the aisle looking at me like, I hope you aren't going to sit by me. But sure enough, I had the seat beside him. I was ready to tell God, I really don't want to talk, when he said, "are you a pastor?"

Oh, great, he said sarcastically. I was hoping I wouldn't have to sit by you, but I thought I would. I was intrigued. I said, "that's funny so why didn't you want to sit by a pastor?" He said, "because I don't want to talk."

I said, "what don't you want to talk about?"

He paused then dove into a long story about how he'd been on a business trip to Mexico and on the trip, he'd been unfaithful to his wife. He felt terrible about it and was very sorry so on the plane he was going to try to decide if he should tell her or not. When he saw me in the airport waiting by the baggage of twenty kids while they all slept, he thought. That guy's probably the pastor and I bet he ends up sitting by me which is just how it played out. Do you think God was at work?

To make a long story short, I didn't sleep for the 4.5 hr. trip and didn't even feel tired. Yes, I told him he should tell his wife, but I also talked to him about grace, forgiveness and the importance of why God wants us to be sexually pure. It's good for us and it keeps us from situations like this. I prayed with him and he was very sincere. I had

him write out a note to his wife so he wouldn't get halfway into the conversation and chicken out. It was a divine moment.

I walk in and out of conversations like this regularly because I don't try to control where the conversation goes. I start where it starts, and I let it go where the Spirit seems to lead. Sometimes I'm very willing to let the conversation go from A to B. It doesn't always have to go from A-Z.

I listen as much or more than I talk so I know what to talk about. I'm glad to share the Gospel but I attempt to discern if it is the right time and place and if I'm the right one.

I'm learning to fish for men and I'm 100% you can too. Jesus would never call us to something He wouldn't enable us to do. We have His Holy Spirit so as we learn to let the Spirit speak, we will hear His thoughts in our head and all we have to do is pass them on.

Disciple

When a person responds to Jesus and becomes a follower then we want to lead that person to become a disciple who will not only pass on the faith but disciple others. This is not a microwave cooking recipe; it takes time and is life on life.

Jesus spent three years with His disciples but after He was gone, they ended up getting the Good News to the next generation and the next country and that just kept on going until it reached you.

It was said of the disciples, we don't know who these people are, but we can tell they've been with Jesus—this is characteristic of a disciple-maker.

Teach those you disciple to be like Jesus. Set your sights high, ask Jesus to lead you to be conformed into the image of Jesus. Pray daily to know Him better and love Him more.

Get them into God's word. Teach them how to use it so they can study it without you.

Discovery

I like the Discovery Bible Study method. I suggest going to discoverapp.org. It is more thorough than I will be here and everything you need to get started is there.

Ideally you bring together a small group of people that already have some kind of affinity. Warm up the group by checking in with each other to see how everyone is doing. Be careful not to get stuck at this point so you might even say, we are going to take ten minutes or so and check in. In this way, you help to set expectations and

perhaps alleviate fears that this will go on forever or turn into something where people feel like they have to share something personal or tell a story.

While the group still has life and energy, read a story in the Gospels, or a passage of scripture in God's word, then ask four simple questions:

1. What does this story/passage tell me about God?
2. What does this story/passage tell me about people or myself?
3. If this is God's word for my life how will I obey it?
4. Who am I going to tell?

Don't be the answer giver. Let the people answer and if they turn to you say, what do you think? The Bible was written to be understood and applied. You can do this.

Conclude your time together by allowing people to voluntarily share their "highs" or "lows" from the week and one thing for which others could pray. Again, this doesn't have to be long or deep. It could become both and that wouldn't necessarily be bad as long as you are reading the room and observing body language to see if people are checking out or leaning in.

It's generally good to leave the group wanting more. Remind them as they go to find someone to tell what God is showing them.

When they return the next week, the last question can become the first question. How did it go telling others?

Take turns leading the group. There is nothing complicated about the methodology. Don't counsel people. Let God's word speak. The leader doesn't have to know all the answers. In fact, it will inhibit the growth of the group or kill it if it turns into a lecture versus discovery Bible study.

In leading the group in this way, you are also building in leadership development. Think of it, the growing disciples are learning to pray, to study God's word, to apply it, to share it and to lead a group. That sounds a lot like what Jesus did.

When the group grows, allow the person who did the inviting or who is offering the hospitality, often called the "person of peace" to start a new group with 4-8 others. This is where reproduction happens. If this happens a time or two you begin to get multiplication.

Unfortunately, we don't have nearly enough of this kind of disciple-making going on in the Western world. We tend to think we should sit in row listening to sermons or sit in groups of Christians who study but don't invite non-believers into their groups. As a

result, we've turned Christianity into a spectator sport instead of an "all skate!"

Belong Before You Believe

In the paradigm of the Western world the first contact with a non-Christian might lead to an invitation to church. It seems safe enough but what if the person turns that down? Where do you go? More and more today people are turning down that invitation.

And if they do go, will they feel out of place? Will they become a spectator? Will anyone befriend them, and will they get to personally wrestle with the scripture in a safe setting? These are all important questions.

I'm not saying, don't invite your friend to church. It might be the best way to start if the Holy Spirit leads you that way. It just shouldn't be the only care we have in our hand.

You could invite them into a smaller group of people who might just be curious to know what kind of book the Bible is. Or better yet, you could ask them if they want to get to know who Jesus was and what He was about?

In many cases today a person needs to belong before they believe. Once they feel included and safe, with trusted friends, they may venture into a group, a class or even a worship service.

Have you ever been to a Jewish service? It would be good to go sometime. Remember they meet on Saturday. Experience what it feels like to feel out of place and feel like you are the only person who doesn't know what is going on.

Your friend needs you, their neighbor, or friend. They need to know your story. They need to see you wrestle with the scriptures. They need authenticity. They need unconditional acceptance. There will be a time to meet them at church but often it is not the first thing but a later thing—maybe even after they've accepted Jesus.

Don't make the sequence of steps in following Jesus an either-or kind of choice between worship gatherings or small groups. Worship gatherings and sermons have their place in equipping the body of believers and providing community but don't let them stand alone. If we do it is unlikely, we will see disciples make disciples who make disciples. For reproduction and multiplication, it takes small numbers and people who are willing to invest in the long haul. They will be there for their friends in the middle of the night. It's life on life.

Who discipled you?

Live On Mission

10.

Shortly after I began teaching the pray, care, share, and disciple lifestyle, I realized that while the process is helpful, it is a mouthful and begs for an explanation. I needed a way to talk about discipleship that was simple. Living on mission is both do-able and attractive.

The life of a disciple is essentially being Jesus to our sphere of influence.

Disciples ask the question, how can I be a part of the kingdom of heaven coming to earth? When earth becomes more like heaven, Good News is shared with the poor. Jesus said, captives are released. Blind eyes open. The oppressed are set free, and the favor of the Lord is present.

When you live like this, you are speaking a language the world can understand and value. We long for redemption. It is the theme of our books, movies, and music.

I love the words—the local church is the hope of the world when the church is working right, as long as we correctly define “the church.” The word for “church” in the Greek language is ekklesia. Literally translated it means, “the called-out ones.”

During the reformation, when Bible translators attempted to define the word ekklesia in their culture, they chose the word “church.” Over time the idea of a building replaced the true meaning of the word.

Translated correctly, the church is a group of disciples living on mission where they live, learn, work, and play. We don’t go to church as much as we ARE the church.

No wonder Jesus could say, I will build my church (the called out ones) and the gates of hell will not prevail against them. The enemy can’t stop people living on mission for Jesus when He is living in and through them. The church is really a community of people living on mission.

Is this you? Are you living on mission? You can live your faith with confidence and know what to say to your friends to help them take a step closer to Jesus. And when you do, you will become more like Jesus in the process. This is living on mission.

Your neighborhood, your workplace, your children’s school, the gym, the local bar or coffee shop are just a few of the places where we can talk about Jesus and find people who might never see themselves in a church building.

We must realize that in today's culture, most of the people we encounter don't think of the church building or program as the answer or they would be there. Only inviting people to attend church with you falls short of reaching people.

Without a relationship with someone with whom they trust that attends a local church, most of the people you might invite will not show up to a new cultural experience. If they didn't grow up in the life of a church community, they are probably not going, and some who grew up in a painful church setting don't plan to go back.

Don't think I'm down on the local church. I believe the church services, program, and people could be a tremendous asset in your life, and I hope that it is. But the church isn't meant to replace individuals living on mission every day. Don't expect your church, or your pastor, to do what you were designed to do—provide the personal touch.

For this reason, we say, people must belong before they believe. If we want to be disciples who make disciples who make disciples, relationship always precedes faith in today's world.

Bill drove a truck over the road, so he was never home on the weekends, but he just lived three homes down from my family. We first befriended his wife, Sarah, and invited her to a group that met in our home. It wasn't long before they were in our home and we were in their home.

Once Bill felt safe, he started asking questions. Only when he knew there would not be shame coming his way did he reveal his struggles, which included his marriage and finances.

Bill was willing to talk about Jesus. Mostly he was curious. Bill didn't know the stories of the Bible; truth be told, he wasn't sure they were real. He wasn't against the church; he just didn't see it as relevant in his life. You might think Bill had a long way to go, but he was closer than he appeared.

Bill had a Zacchaeus kind of heart even though he wasn't a wee little man. He was actually tall and well built. Bill was fun-loving, friendly, open, and generous. He simply wasn't pointed in the right direction in life. But when Bill met Jesus, he went all in. (Not their real names though the persons and story is real.)

Without the community developed in our home and neighborhood, Bill wouldn't have had a chance to discover the love of Jesus.

Our world is full of people like Bill. You have them in your neighborhood, at your workplace, and in your extended family. An invitation to church, before inclusion in a relationship, in Bill's case, would have received an outright rejection.

We will miss a whole generation of people for Jesus if we don't learn to invest before we invite.

Living on mission means we sit with people. We listen well and often. We have their feet under our table, and our feet get under their table. We drink beverages together. We share life. We invest and only as we earn the right to be heard do we speak.

Pray that God would open your eyes to the people in your sphere of influence who are on the heart of God. They may seem close or far from Him.

Draw a circle with your name in the center. Now draw a circle around the circle and put the names of your family in the circle. The next circle you draw includes your extended family. Then draw a circle for neighbors and another for co-workers. Finally, the last circle includes acquaintances that you meet in the third spaces of life that are not home or work.

This series of circles represent the people in your mission field. You don't need to go overseas to be a missionary. You can live on mission every day and sleep in your own bed at night.

Your sphere of influence includes people of different ethnicities. People have various worldviews, and they need a personal approach. No cookie-cutter plan will work.

My prayer is that every person in Kansas City will wake up with a disciple of Jesus who is living on mission where they live, learn, work, and play. We could say the same for any city in the world.

Will you live on mission? Will you live in community and build community where people can belong before they believe?

What if you linked arms with other disciples in your neighborhood or at your workplace to start a discovery Bible study? Could you open your home to a community group? How about inviting the guys to make smores around the fire pit? Maybe the girls should have a play day with the kids and capture some time for adult conversation.

We must talk about Jesus in the open spaces of life. The gospel is Good News beyond our church services and the people who most need to hear it probably aren't there. Think of using your gifts outside of the church program. And of course, if you are part of a local church and I hope you are find a place to serve there too.

The world needs what you have to offer, and you might be the only bridge to Jesus for someone in your sphere of influence.

Today we see the rise of house churches, micro-churches, and boutique churches where small seems to be preferred over large. When our culture thinks of the church as an institution rather than a living, breathing, community of people not so different from them, the result is often that they stay away.

It doesn't have to be this way. Large gatherings can be productive if a church also learns to do small well. Church services must be personal, not impersonal. Programs must be authentic, not just amazing. Worship services need to be full of genuine moments of transcendence. If the Bible is not only a text for the stage but is also a part of healthy life in the community, it will lead to life change.

Speaking of the Bible, nothing is a better indicator of spiritual growth than regularly getting into the word of God and getting the word of God into you. When everyday people open the scriptures in everyday places, the Spirit speaks in applications where the faith can be lived out in everyday ways.

Tools like blesseveryhome.com combine the benefit of seeing your neighborhood with fresh eyes, because you know the names of your neighbors, with the daily support of the scripture. You can color-code neighbors according to whether you simply pray for them, you have a relationship with them, you've shared your faith with them, or you know they are a disciple.

You can add in the names of relatives, co-workers, and friends into the List tab and they will show up on your "daily five" list of names. Podcasts and sharing tips are provided to resource you as you live on mission. **Is this duplicated?**

If you connect with other neighbors who are also living on mission, you can create missional communities. You can group up with others who are spiritually seeking at work, at school, at the gym, or any third space. In this way, the church can be anywhere and everywhere.

My friends, Kelly and Polly Barcol, planted a church in Valdosta, GA. They did church planting right. I should know, I was their coach. I hope you are smiling because I say this sarcastically. Read on and you will see.

They parachuted into the community, which is always hard but soon were having excellent seeker-sensitive services on Sundays and teaching the people to grow as disciples in small groups. They led people to Jesus through their relationships so you might wonder what could go wrong.

Their community grew until it was the desired location for other Christians, and that's when the problems began. The expectations to do all and be all grew. Controversy over what they should believe, and how to best practice their faith grew to toxic

levels. Outright competition to be the best and brightest church in the city took over programming. Soon Kelly and Polly had a hard time reaching the lost and building relationship with people far from God.

Their leadership team began to feel that they weren't playing to their strengths. They didn't see conversion growth. They felt like they were babysitting Christians who expected to be bottle-fed. And at the same time, these followers didn't want to serve or give back. Most of their church didn't know how to share their faith and had little interest to do so.

The activity of the church was sucking the life out of the leaders, and the original vision of reaching people outside of relationship with Jesus was fading fast.

At the same time, this was happening. Kelly and Polly joined CrossFit. They both were active in athletics having been a part of the same cheer squad at Morehead State University in Kentucky. Kelly also was a wrestler who loved gymnastics.

When I talked to them, the gym and the people in the gym were giving them life. I could hear it in their voices. The burden of carrying out the church program while Christians came and went like a revolving door led them to a crisis of faith.

On one unforgettable coaching call Kelly posed the question, I wonder if we could close the church and open a CrossFit gym, he said. We could lose the Christians who didn't want to serve and pour our time into people who have spiritual hunger but don't know Jesus is the answer.

Polly could not only teach but also start discipleship classes in the evenings. She could offer them on multiple nights. Then on a couple of weekends each month, we could gather people to worship, tell life stories, and serve together.

Kelly felt like a failure offering up this idea. Was he whimpering out on church planting? Was he bailing on the church?

I jumped on the idea reminding him of what a church truly is. The more we talked about how to build a relationship with those who don't yet know Jesus, the more excited he became.

Kelly is an evangelist at heart. As we strategized on how to use Polly's strengths of connecting people and coaching life skills, we realized that practically speaking, she was actually discipling people before they believed. She simply started earlier than the time people prayed a salvation prayer.

They prayerfully planned to celebrate the ten years of their church, The Valdosta House

of Joy, with a closing date in mind. Then shortly afterward they opened Winnersville CrossFit Gym and began doing church more effectively than ever.

Soon they were reaching people for Jesus again. Discipleship was happening, and lives were transforming. Worship became vibrant again on a couple of Sunday nights a month. People came because they wanted to not because they felt obligated. The community loved to be together, and they served and gave generously.

Now five years later, they are dreaming about how to multiply the CrossFit model in other cities. The influence of the Winnersville model is so significant that they are launching a Love Lownes county with the same Love KC model you've been studying in this book.

Dozens of churches and disciples are lining up to learn the pray, care, share, and disciple-making model. They are adopting neighborhoods as we do in Kansas City. They are planning to not just go to church but to BE the church where they live, learn, work, and play.

The CrossFit model is a new wineskin in today's culture that is spiritually hungry but doesn't recognize why they are hungry or for what they are hungry. Hint, hint, they are hungry for Jesus but don't know it.

They are made for community but think they need a bar where everybody knows their name to belong. They watched the sitcom "Friends" growing up wishing they had true friends but didn't know how to make them or keep them.

The reason I have hope for the church today isn't because of our impressive buildings or programs although there are some good ones and I regularly participate in a local church. I do invite people but only after they call me a friend and trust me. I certainly don't wait for my church to share Jesus before I talk about the words of life.

I have hope for the Good News in America because of the people we call the church who live on mission every day.

To the extent that a church big or small, traditional or contemporary, house church or the church that meets at a CrossFit gym, practices living the Acts 2 mission it will bear fruit.

Acts 2 tells us the early church devoted themselves to God's word, to building community, to sharing meals, and to communion. A deep sense of awe and God's presence came over them. There were miracles and supernatural signs that God was among them.

They shared their possessions and gave generously to those in need. Their worship was real and authentic. They met in each other's homes, and God's presence was there too. Even the culture around them recognized that this wasn't normal. People wanted into these circles because lives were changing for the good (Acts 2:42-48 paraphrased).

This kind of church, this kind of people living on mission, will always be relevant. When you live on mission like this, you will see heaven come to earth and earth become more like heaven.

Amen, may it be so in us! Let's live on mission every day.

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To invest in you is a privilege, and we invite you into a partnership to extend the Love KC mission. We don't charge for this content, but if you want to pass this on to others—please join in.

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