



# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 1 - The Jesus Mission

### Series Overview

This series will help everyone understand Community's mission of Helping People Find Their Way Back to God through reaching, restoring, and reproducing. After completing this study guide, you will have a clear understanding of "B.L.E.S.S." as how you pursue the Jesus Mission as well as how you can discover your own particular and unique part in Jesus' Mission. Each week this guide will focus on a particular story from Jesus' life that demonstrates his mission and how he fulfilled it through B.L.E.S.S.ing others.

### Who did you BLESS this week? Share the story.

#### Big Idea

We reach, restore and reproduce the Jesus mission like Jesus did with the woman at the well. She was brought back to God, restored in her community, and became a source of others finding their way back to God.

#### Ice Breaker

Have you ever taken a personality profile or quiz like Life-Map, Meyers-Briggs or Strength Finders? What have you learned about yourself from these types of tests?

Reach Restore and Reproduce. These are three components to the Jesus Mission. God has not only called us as a community to Reach people who are far from God, Restore His dream for the world and Reproduce the mission in others – He has given this mission to each of us.

Reaching people who are far from God requires Christ-followers to develop intentional relationships with people outside traditional church settings. This can be done in our current social settings or might require us expanding our social circles by getting involved in our communities or simply inviting our neighbors over for dinner.

Restoring God's dream for the world is not only done by partnering with NGO's or missionaries in foreign countries. Restoring God's dream can simply be done with the conversations we have with those closest to us or with the places we choose to shop or the ways we talk about and view those who are different than us. Living lives of restoration isn't about volunteering, it's about being agents of reconciliation and justice in every facet of life.

Reproduction happens when we engage in relationships with the intention of investing in them what others have invested in us. It really can be as simple as a monthly check-in over coffee or an invitation for a friend to join you to learn more about what Reaching and Restoring looks like in your life.

We can only accomplish the Jesus Mission as a community if we are living it in our own lives.

1. Which R; Reach, Restore, Reproduce, comes most natural for you? Which one do you find the most challenging in your life? Why do you think that is?

It might seem daunting to imagine that we have the ability to reach those who are far from God, restore God's dream for the world and reproduce the mission in others. Jesus, in his own life, shows how the three R's can be accomplished through one encounter with a stranger at a well.

#### Read John 4:8-12

*<sup>8</sup>"It was noon, and after Jesus' disciples had gone into town to buy some food, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well. Jesus asked her, "Would you please give me a drink of water?"<sup>9</sup>"You are a Jew," she replied, "and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink of water when Jews and Samaritans won't have anything to do with each other?"<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered, "You don't know what God wants to give you, and you don't know who is asking you for a drink. If you did, you would ask me for the water that gives life."<sup>11</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get this life-giving water?"<sup>12</sup> Our ancestor Jacob dug this well for us, and his family and animals got water from it. Are you greater than Jacob?"*

#### REACH

2. Have you ever had an encounter with a stranger that led to an unexpected connection or friendship? Maybe you met at your kid's sporting event or perhaps a mutual friend introduced you.



Possibly the most important parts of this story are the differences. Jesus is a man and a Jew. The woman was a Samaritan and alone. It was also the middle of the day, not the typical water fetching time; possibly giving some insight into the woman's lifestyle.

3. There are clearly barriers between Jesus and the woman at the well. What are some social barriers in today's society?

Reaching people who are far from God requires us to get out of our comfort zones. It also might mean being around people whose actions or behaviors give off clues to significant addictions or habits in their lives we aren't comfortable with.

Jesus could have, and probably should have, ignored the woman, but instead He defied societal "rules" and his encounter with her changed her life and many others, possibly an entire community.

4. Is there anyone in your life that you could identify as "the woman at the well"? Maybe someone you see often but don't know, or someone who is clearly a social outcast that you would be uncomfortable speaking to? What are the barriers between you?

As we continue to read about Jesus' encounter with this woman, we see that he doesn't stop at reaching her – he gives her an opportunity to be restored, and she accepts!

Continue reading in John 4 with verses 13-30

*<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again. <sup>14</sup>But no one who drinks the water I give will ever be thirsty again. The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life."<sup>15</sup> The woman replied, "Sir, please give me a drink of that water! Then I won't get thirsty and have to come to this well again."<sup>16</sup> Jesus told her, "Go and bring your husband."<sup>17-18</sup> The woman answered, "I don't have a husband."<sup>19</sup> "That's right," Jesus replied, "you're telling the truth. You don't have a husband. You have already been married five times, and the man you are now living with isn't your husband."<sup>20</sup> The woman said, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. <sup>21</sup>My ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say Jerusalem is the only place to worship."<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to her: "Believe me, the time is coming when you won't worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup>You Samaritans don't really know the*

*one you worship. But we Jews do know the God we worship, and by using us, God will save the world. <sup>24</sup>But a time is coming, and it is already here! Even now the true worshipers are being led by the Spirit to worship the Father according to the truth. These are the ones the Father is seeking to worship him. <sup>25</sup>God is Spirit, and those who worship God must be led by the Spirit to worship him according to the truth. <sup>26</sup>The woman said, "I know that the Messiah will come. He is the one we call Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."<sup>27</sup> "I am that one," Jesus told her, "and I am speaking to you now."<sup>28</sup> The woman left her water jar and ran back into town. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Could he be the Messiah?"<sup>30</sup> Everyone in town went out to see Jesus.*

## RESTORE

Restoring God's dream for the woman at the well was not just about her making a new friend in Jesus. Jesus' relationship with this woman gave her a confidence and passion that empowered her to embrace a new role in her community. As soon as Jesus revealed to this woman who He was, she began to live out a new role in her home town. Instead of the outcast adulterous woman, she was actually stepping into restoration and leading her whole community in finding God.

5. How have you seen your relationship with God restore God's dream for your life?
6. How are you currently working to restore God's dream for the world in your family? Community? The world?

Finish reading the story in John 4:30, 39-42

*<sup>30</sup>Everyone in town went out to see Jesus. <sup>39</sup>lot of Samaritans in that town put their faith in Jesus because the woman had said, "This man told me everything I have ever done."<sup>40</sup> They came and asked him to stay in their town, and he stayed on for two days. <sup>41</sup>Many more Samaritans put their faith in Jesus because of what they heard him say. <sup>42</sup>They told the woman, "We no longer have faith in Jesus just because of what you told us. We have heard him ourselves, and we are certain that he is the Savior of the world!"*

# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 1 - The Jesus Mission

# Small Group Mission

## Helping People Find Their Way Back to God



### Reproduce

In this story Jesus shows the heart of reproduction. It is when one life that has been reached and restored begins reaching out and seeing God's dream restored in others' lives. The woman at the well was so deeply impacted by her encounter with Jesus that she wasted no time demolishing social barriers to invite others to have encounters with Him as well.

7. Have you ever had the opportunity to help someone find their way back to God? What was that like?

Reproducing the Jesus Mission is the engine of the church and the key to accomplishing the Jesus Mission and helping people find their way back to God!

8. Remembering your answer from #1, what is one thing you can do this week in Reaching someone who is far from God, Restoring someone to community or Reproducing the Jesus mission in another?

**Reach, Restore and Reproduce.** This is the Jesus Mission. The next several weeks we will be covering five important practices you can put into place in your daily life that will help. They are:

B - Begin With Prayer

L - Listen

E - Eat

S - Serve

S - Story

### Next Steps

- Continue working through the Small Group Mission document with your small group.
- Read other encounters Jesus has with people in the Bible. Note some of the other barriers Jesus crossed to reach those who didn't understand who He was.
- Ask God to help you see and understand what His dreams are for this world starting with your own life and the life of your family.
- Take someone out for coffee this week to simply see how they are doing.

### Missional Practices: B.L.E.S.S.

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### Type of Small Group On Mission

- One Mission:** The entire small group commits to going after the same mission. This can be a new idea originating from the group, or it can involve plugging into an existing ministry or program in the community.
- Multiple Missions:** Each member of the group has a specific mission they are following God in. The group provides a place to celebrate individual stories, wrestle through questions and challenges and provide support and encouragement.

### Mission, Plan and Milestones:

- Our/my mission is . . .

### Group Dynamics

- Confidentiality:** Everything shared in group stays in the group.
- Participation:** Everyone participates in our discussions and our mission.
- Empty Chair:** We always keep an "empty chair" as a sign of our openness to new people joining us.

### Group Leadership

Coach \_\_\_\_\_  
Leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Apprentice Leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Host \_\_\_\_\_

1. Encourage your small group to identify which of the three R's they are more wired to focus on. Most people are more comfortable with one of the three, or have a harder time with one. Be prepared to go first to bring a better understanding of how the question can be answered.
2. Be sure the group understands a "stranger" doesn't mean someone random off the street. Some of us can talk to those kinds of strangers easily, but others need to be in a familiar and neutral environment in order to get to know new people. Those are still strangers!
3. This is easy. Economic barriers are obvious as are Race barriers. Moral barriers like homosexuality or infidelity or inappropriate behavior are hot topics, but feel free and bold to expose them. We as the church have been estranged from those who do not live in ways that reflect OUR faith. These are real barriers we must admit to.
4. If your group is having a hard time answering this question, challenge them to think about all the people they come in contact with in a day. Who do they brush past? Who makes them uncomfortable? Who do they avoid?
5. If this is difficult to understand, we're simply looking to talk about how God has restored our lives. Restored relationships? Restored health? Restored faith?
6. Many people are currently actively working to restore God's dream in some way. Encourage people to celebrate the little things – like how they are raising their children or the ways they are fighting for their marriages.
7. Some people might not realize that they have helped if they didn't actually pray a prayer with someone. Encourage your group to think of people they are confident God used to help better understand who He is.
8. Encourage your group to think creatively and simply. Small steps are critical. If you can, set up accountability within your group for the remainder of the small group discussion.



## Big Idea Discussion Guide Session 2 - B - Begin With Prayer

### Who did you BLESS this week? Share the story.

#### Big Idea

To reach, restore, and reproduce we begin by praying about who God wants us to bless each day and how He particularly wants us as individuals to bless our world.

#### Ice Breaker

Take turns reciting a memorized prayer from childhood.  
Ex: Meal time and bedtime prayers.

B.L.E.S.S. represents a set of tools we can use to help us be on mission in our daily lives. B stands for "Begin With Prayer." Beginning with prayer is not only a good idea, but it is modeled by Jesus many times in Scripture. Jesus is seen many times in story of his life on earth going off on his own to pray. He did this when he was tired, before a long tiring time of ministry and healing, before his crucifixion and before choosing his disciples – just to name a few.

1. Why do you think prayer was such a central part of Jesus' life on earth, after all, he was already God?

Read the following Scripture and answer the questions that follow:

#### Scripture - Luke 6:12-16

<sup>12</sup> About that time Jesus went off to a mountain to pray, and he spent the whole night there. <sup>13</sup> The next morning he called his disciples together and chose twelve of them to be his apostles. <sup>14</sup> One was Simon, and Jesus named him Peter. Another was Andrew, Peter's brother. There were also James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, <sup>15</sup> Matthew, Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus. The rest of the apostles were Simon, known as the Eager One, <sup>16</sup> Jude, who was the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus."

2. How do you imagine Jesus' all-night prayer time was like?
3. Have you ever spent a significant time of prayer before making a big decision? What was that experience like?

Jesus' life is full of fascinating decisions and actions. This particular story recounts when Jesus chose his team of closest friends. These men mentioned were to spend the next few years traveling with Jesus, learning and helping him in his ministry. Jesus' decision was critical.

4. Have you ever been picked for a job or team that you knew you were under qualified for? How did it turn out? What did you learn?

Since we have the rest of the story recorded in scripture, we know that Jesus' choices weren't necessarily "dream team" material. Clearly Jesus' time of prayer did not lead him to choose the brightest and most gifted people in town. In fact, even after their years with Jesus and after his death, the disciples were still known as ordinary men.

#### Acts 4:13

<sup>13</sup> When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

One of the important things Beginning with Prayer does is allows God to shape our minds and hearts to see the world through his perspective. Often times, just like with Jesus, God takes us in directions that don't make much sense to us or those around us.

#### Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

5. Share a time you realized God's ways and thoughts were not your ways or thoughts. How did that impact your life?

# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 2 - B - Begin With Prayer

# Small Group Mission

## Helping People Find Their Way Back to God



Begin with Prayer. For us to live lives on mission, we need to spend time hearing from God daily. It's a common thought that prayer is just about asking God for things, and yet the Bible says we should pray continually. Prayer, although at times it is asking God for things and even simply talking with God about things, is also and possibly most importantly a state of being. Prayer is a stance or a position. When we quiet our hearts before God we can go throughout our day in constant communication with him – truly praying continually.

6. What are some barriers that keep you from this kind of prayer?

Beginning with Prayer doesn't mean only taking a list of names and ideas to God and asking him to bless, guide and direct. Most importantly, beginning with prayer means bringing our hearts and minds to God and inviting him to reshape our understanding so that we can be transformed into his image.

Paul describes the effects of prayer this way:

*"Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him." 2 Corinthians 3:18*

### Next Steps

- Continue working through the Small Group Mission document with your small group.
- Set 10-30 minutes aside each day this week to simply be quiet with God. Begin your time by praying something like this:  
*"God, teach me to listen to you so that I can be used by you in my family, community and world. Reveal yourself to me so that by knowing you I may know those I come in contact with as you know them."*
- Practice communicating with God throughout your day. It might feel like you are talking to yourself at first, but push through the discomfort and purpose to share your thoughts and experiences with God as you would a friend or family member.

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1. There's lots of possible answers. There's no "wrong" answer. Possible answers will be:
  - a. Refuel and refocus
  - b. His humanity was a natural barrier from his Father – he needed that time to reconnect.
  - c. It was a good example for others to follow
2. Again, lots of possible answers with no wrong answers. Maybe he slept! Maybe he looked up at the stars and was just silent. Maybe he walked around the mountain. Maybe he vented all of his feelings and experiences verbally.
3. Many people pray about big decisions like jobs or marriages or health decisions. Encourage those stories to be told.
4. Again, another opportunity to share stories that reveal more about the group. Encourage stories even if they go off a bit. This is a great relational opportunity. Also, following Jesus means feeling unqualified!
5. This might be a good chance to encourage those who haven't shared to participate.
6. Often times we come to God with our requests. We look at him like a Divine Santa. It's hard to get past what we want or think we need to really just listen to God. Even when we do try to focus on listening, our thoughts fill our mind flooding our awareness of all the things we need to do! It's not easy!



# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 3 - L - Listen

### Who did you BLESS this week? Share the story.

#### Big Idea

To bless people on the Jesus Mission, we will listen to people's needs and stories more than we talk.

#### Icebreaker

Try being completely silent as a group for the next 60 seconds. How many different sounds did you hear? What were they? (see who heard the most) How did it feel to sit in silence that long? (Uncomfortable, awkward, peaceful, relaxing?)

If we look closely into the life of Jesus, we can see the types of missional practices He modeled for us. We learn that He didn't just go around preaching at people or healing them; rather He was always intentional and relational with people. Here's just one example—pay attention to Jesus' interaction and which missional principles He is living out:

When Jesus was coming close to Jericho, a blind man sat begging beside the road. The man heard the crowd walking by and asked what was happening. Some people told him that Jesus from Nazareth was passing by. So the blind man shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" The people who were going along with Jesus told the man to be quiet. But he shouted even louder, "Son of David, have pity on me!" Jesus stopped and told some people to bring the blind man over to him. When the blind man was getting near, Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see!" he answered. Jesus replied, "Look and you will see! Your eyes are healed because of your faith." Right away the man could see, and he went with Jesus and started thanking God. When the crowds saw what happened, they praised God." (Luke 18:35-43)

1. Why do you think Jesus asked "What do you want me to do for you?"

2. What do you think is the biggest barrier to you truly listening to the people (and communities) in your life?
  - a. I'm too overwhelmed with my own stuff.
  - b. I'm afraid of what they might share.
  - c. I don't know the right questions to ask.
  - d. It's hard for me to care about what's going on with others.
  - e. Other (please explain)
3. Have you ever assumed you knew what someone needed, only to find out later that you were wrong? Share the story.
4. Do you feel like you have people in your life that genuinely listen to you? What specifically do they do that helps you feel like that? (as compared to people you interact with and leave feeling they weren't really listening to you)

Christian writer Mike Yaconelli was quoted as bluntly stating "Christians need to know when to shut up." He tells the story of Joseph Bayly, a guy who lost 3 children to death before the age of 18. When his son was in the hospital as a high schooler, laying there dying, he says all these well-meaning Christians showed up quoting Scripture verses and wanting to pray long prayers over him and his son. And Joseph admits, "I couldn't wait for them to leave." Then one friend just came in and didn't say a thing--just sat there with him in silence. Joseph says "I never wanted that guy to leave." He knew when to shut up.

# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 3 - L - Listen

# Small Group Mission

## Helping People Find Their Way Back to God



5. Why do you think most people have such a hard time not talking and just listening sometimes?
6. Why do you think it's so important for us to listen to people's (or our community's) needs before or as we begin serving them?
7. What are some things we could be listening for from the people we are trying to help find their way back to God?

### Next Steps

- Continue working through the Small Group Mission document with your small group.
- If you've already identified as a small group or individually what your mission is going to be, determine what next steps you can take to really listen to what the needs are, how you can best meet those needs, and how God's story is relevant.
- For example, if your mission is focused on a particular neighborhood or town, you could begin reading the local papers/websites and attending community meetings to learn what the most pressing needs are.
- And if your mission is focused on a specific person or family, you can begin asking deeper questions about their lives, as you are spending time together relationally. Be ready to be vulnerable yourself, so it's a two-way street.

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1. The point here is getting people to realize that even though it seemed very “obvious” what the blind man most wanted, Jesus didn’t just assume and start serving him. Rather, He took the time to ask and really listen to what the guy most needed. You could point out too that the blind man must’ve been listening (was his hearing elevated due to his blindness?) because he knew that Jesus was someone who could help him, and he knew when Jesus was coming by.
2. This is trying to help people identify what keeps us from being more in tune to the needs around us. Follow this question up with “What can we do about these barriers?”
3. This isn’t meant to beat anyone up for mistakes we’ve made in the past, but rather to learn together that it’s just not wise to assume the best way to learn people—that we need this important step of LISTENING!
4. This question is meant to help us learn from people we know are good at listening and being in tune to the needs of others. It always helps to know tangible examples of seeing this lived out, so we can apply it too!
5. Let the group discuss this and see where they land—maybe it’s because ultimately we constantly fight the battle to focus on needs beyond our own and move towards an others-centered life.
6. Hopefully it’s clear to the group by now—so many dangers in just assuming how to best help people, without ever listening to what they need! Yet that’s what Christians/churches/people in general often do. Plus listening shows that we truly value people and see them as more than projects, but that we care about what’s going in their lives.
7. Whether it’s individual people or entire communities, we can be listening for places where they are hurting, where they need God to show up, where the Gospel is relevant, where they are feeling “un-listened” to, where there are needs that nobody but God can do anything about, etc.



## Who did you BLESS this week? Share the story.

### Big Idea

We will bless our world by sharing meals with people in need of being reached and restored.

### Icebreaker

What is one of your favorite memories of sharing a meal with someone (outside of your own family)?

When we think of how Jesus spent His time doing ministry, we often think of Him preaching to crowds, healing people, and praying. But there was another important aspect to His life that can be easy to overlook. Check it out:

### Read Matthew 9:9-13

<sup>9</sup>As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

<sup>10</sup>While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup>When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" <sup>12</sup>On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>13</sup>But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

1. Why do you think the Pharisees were so offended and upset by the idea of Jesus eating with Matthew and the other tax collectors?
2. What do you think it meant to Matthew that Jesus was willing to come eat with him and his friends?

3. There are so many details the Bible leaves out about Jesus' life, yet it includes stories of many times that Jesus shared meals with people. Why do you think this was important enough that God wanted it included so clearly and so often in Scripture?
4. Which of these best describes your feelings about sharing meals with people? Why do you think you're wired like that?
  - a. I prefer to eat alone.
  - b. I don't mind eating with close friends or family, but I don't like sharing meals with people beyond that.
  - c. I love eating with anyone I can (co-workers, neighbors, new people), whether I know them well or not.
  - d. Other (please explain)
5. What do you think Jesus meant by "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick"?

The challenge to share meals with people is really about the challenge to build a relationship with them. But that can be hard sometimes—it requires intentionality, time, energy, risk, and sacrifice.

6. Why is it so important to build a relationship with people rather than just serve them or tell them about Jesus right away?

# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 4 - E - Eat

# Small Group Mission

## Helping People Find Their Way Back to God



7. What is the biggest obstacle to you being able to share meals with the people you want to help find their way back to God?
  - a. I just don't have enough time.
  - b. It's uncomfortable for me.
  - c. I don't want to make them uncomfortable.
  - d. I can't cook and/or don't have the money to eat out.
  - e. I don't even know who I would invite to eat with me.
  - f. Other (please explain)
8. How would you overcome the obstacles people shared for #7? (work together as a group to figure out practical helpful ideas for people)

### Next Steps

- Continue working through the Small Group Mission document with your small group.
- Pick one person/family to invite this week to eat with you (even if you're just getting it on the calendar for the future). It can be a neighbor, co-worker, friend, etc.—if you've been "Beginning with prayer" and "Listening," then hopefully God is making it apparent to you.

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Host \_\_\_\_\_

1. Back then, if you hung out with people and associated with them, it looked very bad on you. It meant you give permission to their lifestyle and are one of them. An interesting follow-up question: Is the same still true today? Do Christians get judged for who they hang out with?
2. It had to mean a LOT to Matthew—Jesus was proving how much He cared about Matthew. Not only was He willing to eat together, He did it AT Matthew's house and WITH Matthew's friends! It's one thing for us to take the step to eat with people, but how often do we take the step to hang out with THEIR friends, and be the only "new person" in the crowd?
3. We should not under-estimate how important relationship-building was to Jesus' ministry, as illustrated by the fact that there are so many gospel stories of Jesus sharing meals with people. It seems God wanted this to be very clear, yet somehow "evangelism" has often been portrayed to being about yelling at people with bullhorns.
4. This isn't about beating people up, but about understanding what our own personal barriers will be to trying to build relationships, so we can work through those. Maybe point people back to the Ice-Breaker question so they can remember positive experiences they've had sharing meals with others.
5. Jesus could've been inferring that His focus was to be on those far from God and not just on Christians (should that be true of us too?). He wasn't saying the Pharisees were "healthy", but they didn't recognize their sickness, so maybe He was being a bit sarcastic to them in making His point?
6. It is absolutely essential that we build relationships with people first—that's what God called us to. He says to "love your neighbor as yourself," not "convert your neighbor." In fact, HE does the work in people's hearts to draw them to Him—not us. So we are meant to do the loving and serving. We cannot see people as projects. Here's a tough question to consider: even if you knew someone would never find God, would you build a relationship with them anyway?
7. This isn't meant to make anyone feel bad, it's just meant to help people do some introspection to discover what their biggest barriers are and where those come from—which can be the first step to overcoming them! (which we'll do in question #8)
8. Work through this together as a group and come up with ideas. Here are a few suggestions for each:
  - a. None of us have enough time—but of course we make time for what's important (if you suddenly took a class or enrolled your kid into sports, you'd make time). So how can we prioritize this in our schedules?
  - b. We just have to push through this and rely on God to work!
  - c. We just have to push through this and rely on God to work!
  - d. There are simple meals (pasta) we can make, and cheap ways to eat out. And remember—it's not about the food!
  - e. Who are the people in your life that you have some relationship with, but are far from God? If there's nobody, then that's a different issue to address—how do we put ourselves back into those circles? And don't forget the "begin with prayer" and "listen" step!



# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 5 - S - Serve

**Who did you BLESS this week? Share the story.**

### Big Idea

To bless people on the Jesus Mission, we will serve individuals and communities at their point of need that are identified as we listen.

### Icebreaker

What is a funny, unique talent you have that most people don't know about?

### Introduction

"Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words" (Francis of Assisi). I don't know about you but I have heard, read and seen that quote more times than I can count. And I'll be honest, each time I see it, I think, "I don't have time for that." Or "I don't think that's totally true, sooo...maybe that doesn't apply to my situation." Or "I don't really like to serve, so I'm just gonna say Francis was a sissy and we don't have to listen to him." But in my more serious moments, when the Holy Spirit usually surprises me with a kidney punch, I'm reminded that what this Italian Catholic friar was saying, is that our role in the Kingdom is simply meet the needs of those around us as we listen to what God is saying.

1. Have you seen this at work – someone who has preached the Gospel without using words?

This year, one of my neighbors lost his job. His job loss was due to customer service issues and in his line of work, it has made it almost impossible for him to get past a 2nd interview; in fact, he hasn't...for the past 10 months. I'm very concerned for their family, but for anyone who knows me, I have hard time moving beyond being "very concerned". Maybe you can relate.

Well not this time! This time I decided to move beyond just being "concerned" to helping in any way we can. In

this case, we felt the a good next step would be to give them gift cards. Gift cards for a restaurant and movie and offered to watch their kids for them as their family lives out of state and they can't really afford childcare. Ok, for some of you, this is not a big deal and you might be thinking why did it take me so long to do such a thing. To you I say good point! For most of us, we are slow to act on these things and we need to step it up when it comes to serving those around us. We need to ask God to show us where and how we can meet the burdens of those in our lives. We've got to be willing to take risks and keep from hoarding our time, talents, and resources from those who need it most...to be a B.L.E.S.S.ing to those individuals and communities around us.

### Scripture - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (MSG)

*<sup>4-11</sup>God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful: wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, healing the sick, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits..."*

This passage is primarily teaching about unity in the church, but there are plenty of other nuggets in it. From where does this passage say our gifts come? (raise your hand and say God). Ok, that's the churchy answer and it happens to be the biblical answer this time.

2. Do you really believe our gifts are from God? And do we act like they are? Discuss.
3. If this passage says everyone benefits, how have you benefited from the gifts God has given you? How have you been blessed by someone else using their gifts to serve you?



- I like how The Message (MSG) puts the gifts in such plain language: wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, etc. Do you know what your gift(s) is (are)? How have you served someone or served your community in one of these ways?

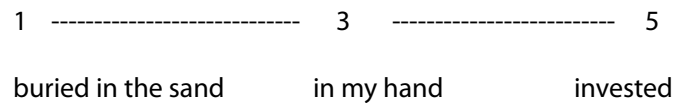
**Matthew 25:14-30 (MSG)**

*A Story about Investment - 14-18* "It's also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master's investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master's money. 19-21 "After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.' 22-23 "The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.' 24-25 "The servant given one thousand said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.' 26-27 "The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest. 28-30 "Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this "play-it-safe" who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.'

- This is a tough passage, but God has something to say to us, what do you think it is?

- Why does this manager seem to reward risk as stated in vs. 28-30? How do you think this reflects God's character?

- Where would you place yourself on the scale for how you're using the talents God has given you to serve others around you and within the community in which you live:



- Where is God giving you a high five when it comes to investing the talents and gifts into someone's life? Where is he challenging you to make a bigger impact in serving others?

**Next Steps**

- Continue working through the Small Group Mission document with your small group.
- Take a step to discover what your spiritual gifts are. Community offers at each campus a course called LifeMAP that helps you determine your gifts. Contact your Campus Pastor to learn more about this opportunity.

# Small Group Mission

*Helping People Find Their Way Back to God*



## Missional Practices: B.L.E.S.S.

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- E** **Eat:** We will share meals with those to whom we are sent.
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- One Mission:** The entire small group commits to going after the same mission. This can be a new idea originating from the group, or it can involve plugging into an existing ministry or program in the community.
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## Mission, Plan and Milestones:

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## Group Leadership

Coach \_\_\_\_\_

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1. This really isn't a difficult thing for us to do. However, as Christ-followers in the Western world we are most used to simply espousing what we think vs. what we do or feel. However, if we're going to help people get that we love them and we want nothing more for them to have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, it means, that many times, the best way to show that, is to serve them.
2. If we believe our gifts are from God we remove: arrogance, pride, timidity, stupidity and a myriad of other "ities". We need to acknowledge, as Christ-followers, God has blessed us with the Holy Spirit. This acknowledgement means that the Creator of the universe lives in us. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). By realizing all these gifts come from God, we can find freedom in what we're good at...what we're great at! Baking, singing, caring for people during difficult times, knowledge, faith...all from God. Which lets us just relax, play an active role, and let the Holy Spirit lead.
3. This passage reminds us that the gifts God has given Christ-followers are not designed for consumption as we are used to doing in our previous life (before Jesus). Instead these gifts are designed to bless others; to serve them. Looking around and thinking back to times where this has happened to us, will get us on track to helping others experience that too.
4. Maybe when we hear the phrase "spiritual gifts" it can be a bit overwhelming. Almost too ethereal, untouchable. However The Message paraphrases these gifts in ways in which we can connect. Maybe you've helped someone deal with a loss in his/her family or assisted someone financially during a difficult time. Or helped a co-worker not take his/her job so seriously; alleviating immense amounts of stress in their life.
5. This passage has several teachings in it, but the emphasis is on doing something with the talents God has given us. Not to "play-it-safe" as many do. Instead God wants us to take a risk, try some things. Don't just bury them in the sand and hope you will keep things just the way you are. Take a long hard look at what God has given you and ask God to bless your efforts as you reach out to serve those around you.
6. I think this passage reminds us that God does not ask us to be successful, but faithful. As quippy as that sounds, God is simply reminding us, "I am with you." If God is with us, then risk is not alone; it is always in the presence of God. And what is risk, when you have Jesus on your side? In a culture where we have insurance plans, retirement plans, lawyers, police officers, doctors...etc, it can be easy to get to place of playing it safe. However, God reminds us here, that we are to take risks; go out on a limb and see how God can use us to bless those around us.
7. This scale can help people share their inadequacies and where God is doing amazing things through the way God has gifted them. Some will be accurate in their sharing. Others will be too hard on themselves (be sure to affirm areas where you see them taking risks). Still others will be too generous – and I would be open with them about where they could take more risks. Be sure to give space for people to share, but be willing to push back as your group sharpens one another (Proverbs 27:17).
8. Ok, the scale was for reflection, this one is for getting specific. We are looking for examples here. We want those who aren't risking his/her talents to realize they need to do that – to serve others. We want those are doing that, to celebrate the courage God has given them to make such an impact. Its time to get practical and get it done – lets be a blessing and help individuals and communities through serving.



# Big Idea Discussion Guide

## Session 6 - S - Story

### Who did you BLESS this week? Share the story.

#### Big Idea

To bless people on the Jesus Mission, we will share the story of Jesus with people we are seeking to bless.

#### Icebreaker

If you had to put a title on the story you would tell at parties, what would the title of that story be? (you can share the story after group!)

#### Introduction

I enjoy a good story. That's why I love watching movies so much, as they tell a story. I enjoy a good story, but I really enjoy it when it's told well. I have a friend, who has taught me much in this area. He is one of the best storytellers I know. Anytime I'm at a party and I'm with him, I often times listen to him just to learn the art of good story telling.

The story of Jesus is the best story ever told. Before the printing press, people would tell that story over and over and over again; to their friends, family, neighbors, co-laborers, strangers, the sick and hurting, the widow, the orphan...to everyone! Can you imagine if we didn't have the written word of God so accessible to us, it would be very sad and frustrating. However, I feel one of the damages of having it so accessible to us (seriously, how many copies of the Bible do you have in your house – I have about 25) is not being able to tell the story of Jesus in an inspiring, compelling, life-changing kind of way.

We learned earlier in this Big Idea series, that when the woman at the well encountered Jesus, she went back and told everyone about how Jesus is real and how they needed to meet this Savior. In John 4:39-42, it says at that point they believed! As we seek God by beginning in prayer, listening to the needs of those around us, eating with them, serving them, we, over time, prayerfully, will be given permission to tell our story. It is through our story that we can talk about how Jesus has become real to us or is becoming real to us, jumping in the Jesus Mission game to see what God does next.

### Scripture - John 3:1-5 (MSG)

<sup>1-2</sup> There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we all know you're a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it." <sup>3</sup> Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to—to God's kingdom." <sup>4</sup> "How can anyone," said Nicodemus, "be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus said, "You're not listening."

1. How would you describe in your own words what's taking place in this passage up to this point?
2. Can you share a time where you felt someone wasn't listening to you or that you weren't listening to them?

### John 3:5-9 (MSG)

<sup>5-6</sup> Jesus said, "You're not listening." Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit. <sup>7-8</sup> "So don't be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be 'born from above'—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God." <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus asked, "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?"



3. In vv. 7-8 I am reminded about the Spirit and His ability to be unpredictable. How have you felt God moving in unpredictable ways while you were sharing the story of Jesus with someone? If you've never experienced this, in what ways do you need to rely more upon God's Spirit in spiritual conversations?

**John 3:10-12 (MSG)**

*10-12 Jesus said, "You're a respected teacher of Israel and you don't know these basics? Listen carefully. I'm speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don't believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can't see, the things of God?"*

4. What does Jesus say in vv. 10-12 about Nicodemus' questions? Share a time where you felt the Spirit challenging you to take a spiritual conversation to a deeper level with someone.

**John 3:16-18 (MSG)**

*16-18 "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him."*

5. Nicodemus seems to be testing Jesus' patience in their dialogue. How has someone tested your patience in you telling the story of Jesus?
6. Jesus models for us the elegance of a great story that compels even a biblical scholar to rethink their understanding of God. How you would put into words what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus in regards to being born again in plain language (no churchy words)?

Most are familiar with John 3:16, but how many of us knew it's a verse from a conversation of Jesus helping someone find their way back to Him? The context is beautiful.

7. How is this a reminder about how we are to approach leading people towards the salvation Jesus talks about in 3:16?

Nicodemus was one of 2 people who removed Jesus from the cross after he was crucified (John 19). This John 3 encounter changed his life for eternity. I can imagine the tears he must have shed as he removed Jesus' crucified body from the cross and prepared him for burial.

8. How are you allowing the reality of Jesus to change your life? How is God challenging you to share your story to others about how Jesus is real in your life?

**Bonus Question**

Dick Staub author of *Too Pagan, Too Christian* challenges how we think about traditional evangelism. In his book he essentially says, "If you knew someone wasn't going to ever become a Christian, would you still be there friend?"

9. What are your thoughts on this? How does this challenge your current line of thinking in spiritual conversations and pointing someone to Jesus?

**Next Steps**

- Continue working through the Small Group Mission document with your small group .
- Maybe you haven't yet said yes to Jesus. Be sure to get your questions answered, but don't be like Nicodemus and simply dodge the reality of Him by empty questions. Say yes to Jesus today and celebrate it with your small group.
- Practice telling your story; how has Jesus become real to you and changed everything in your life? Take the time to write out your story and share it with your small group.

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1. I like challenging our group members to wrestle through sharing Scripture in a way that makes sense to them – in their plain language – because that is how the Bible was shared for centuries. Jesus and Nicodemus are having a private, intimate conversation about the Holy Spirit and being “born again” as a God-follower. Jesus is rocking Nicodemus’ world! Nicodemus that he had a handle on things as the biblical scholar (part of the Sanhedrin – legalistic, religious sect during Jesus’ day) – and really Nicodemus was only scratching the surface as Jesus talks about this kind of religion in John 5: 39,40.
2. Classic. There are plenty of sociological studies that show we are not great listeners. Often times the best skill we have while someone is telling us something, is thinking about what we are going to say once they’re jaw stops moving. Sad. We have got to get better at simply holding out thoughts and genuinely wrestling through what someone is trying to say to us. “Why are they talking to me about their job right now?” “Why did she just share that about her marriage?” “I wonder if he told me about that addiction because he’s finally beginning to trust me. God what do I say next?” It’s time we listen.
3. The Holy Spirit is the most powerful force on the planet – He is God within us. Jesus told us in Acts 1:8, that the Holy Spirit is going to come inside us and change the world. The Holy Spirit does this life change as we serve the communities around us and as we share the story of Jesus to those who are far from God. Often times, the Holy Spirit can be unpredictable – that can drive us crazy. But we need to get better at celebrating the mystery of God and stop relying upon a God that fits in a box. There is not a box big enough on the planet to contain what God can do through a person who genuinely yields themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. God wants to speak to us even in the moment of a spiritual conversation. It is good for us to pray for wisdom, discernment, sensitivity...before we talk to someone about Jesus, but we can also seek God as we speak – asking God to give us a unique perspective to the conversation as it unfolds. As we seek to do this more often, I think we will find that God is not as linear as most of us think.
5. Rocky soil (Luke 8:4-15). Those who aren’t quite ready to receive the Gospel. They act all curious or even hostile with their questions, but they aren’t really open or they aren’t really sure what they want. I’ve experienced that many times. It saddens me, even though it can be great practice! We need to discern what God is really saying through these conversations. Is this person authentically searching or are they simply wasting time. I’m not saying God wants us to give up on those individuals, but to instead pray for God to break through the hardened soil so we can get to fertile ground to plant the seed of the Gospel – like Jesus did with Nicodemus.
6. This will be a tough exercise for most. Again, my intention here is to get us as Christ-followers to get speak in plain language – so that the people we are sharing the story of Jesus to, get it. Encourage everyone to participate and remind them there is no wrong answer and to maybe come up with their own metaphors.
7. I love John 3:16. However, often times I only see that text when it’s on a billboard or on a massive poster at a football game. Interesting part is that this conversation (John 3:16) takes place in an intimate dialogue not blasted from rooftops without any personal intimacy. I guess I’m trying to help us get this...sharing the story of Jesus can be done with strangers, no doubt. God is at work in people’s lives without us ever saying a word, so I understand some will be ready to say yes to Jesus through an ad, poster or bullhorn. However, most require a relationship, a friendship. Jesus models his salvation path through spiritual conversation; through someone seeking.
8. This is simply about getting back to the roots of why even share the story of Jesus. I once heard Tim Keller, author of Reason for God, talk about this. He basically said we need to let the Gospel penetrate our hearts before we can tell others about Jesus. Sounds simple, but most of us haven’t done that – which is probably why we aren’t so actively involved in telling others. Encourage your group members to share on this one – to really get to the core as to why they love Jesus and how He’s currently changing their life. If you have non-believers in the group, as if they would be willing to share where they’re at on their spiritual journey. Referencing Luke 15, and the story of the Prodigal Son will be helpful in this conversation too... recognizing the son who is far from the father and how he wants to come back home, but just isn’t sure how.
9. Dick Staub is challenging our current line of thought. We treat our non-Christian friends like projects. We simply see them as a “get-them-to-church-baptize-them” kind of project. Staub suggests that people know that. They can sense it. If we see them as a project, we treat them like that, and they can feel that. He instead encourages us to see our relationships as a relationship. Self-sacrificing, loving, patient-filled relationship. Allow God to work through that, see it as a journey and not focus on the end result.

### Community Christian Church

Authors - Carter Moss, Eric Metcalf, Sher Sheets

Edited by: Carter Moss