

Week Eight

The Rhythm of Reaching Out (part two)

“... and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

INTRODUCTION

God has placed us, intentionally, in the lives of countless people.

Family members, friends, neighbours, work colleagues.... people we bump into each day – on the school playground, at the shops, in our school or University halls, on the train. So, how do we go about loving these people?

At King's, we use a very practical and simple acronym: 'BLESS' – it's about finding simple but significant ways to bless people.

The 'B' stands for 'Begin with prayer', knowing that pursuing Jesus' mission should always begin with prayer. The 'L' is 'Listen' (to pay attention to people's hopes, fears and pain.) 'E' is 'eat together', making time to chat over a meal or a coffee.

The first 'S' is 'serve' (acts of kindness, meeting needs, looking for ways to love people). And the final 'S'... 'Share' (being ready, when the opportunity comes, to share the story of what Jesus has done in your life, and to share the life-changing truth of the Gospel). This week's devotionals are deliberately practical, as we look at each stage of BLESS in turn. Get ready to see God at work in all kinds of wonderful ways, as we consider how we can BLESS the people He has placed in our lives.

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

Day one

Reading: Luke 6:12-16

Day two

Reading: Luke 18:35-43

Day three

Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

Day four

Reading: John 13:1-15

Day five

Reading: John 9:13-25

1 Rhythm of Reaching Out (part two) | Begin with prayer

Reading: Luke 6:12-16

DEVOTIONAL

We're looking this week at how we can develop a lifestyle of intentionally blessing the people that God has placed around us.

So, once you have a group of people in mind – once you have a 'BLESS' list – where do you start? The place to begin is prayer.

In today's passage, Jesus goes out to pray, and spends the night talking to his Father. Imagine being there for that night of prayer... the Son talking to his Father, in the joy of the Spirit, about the people he loves.

I wonder, was it a night of joy, of singing, of shouting? Or was it a night of peaceful, quiet listening? Perhaps both. Either way, it seems from Luke's account that Jesus' choice of his 12 disciples was a direct result of this night of prayer.

Pursuing Jesus' mission in our lives should always begin with prayer. It's unlikely we'll have the opportunity **every** day to sit with people, to listen to them or to eat with them. But one thing we **can** commit to is to pray... to lift these people up to God, and to ask for opportunities to bless them.

I wonder, what sorts of things stop you from praying for the people God has placed in your lives?

Is it a lack of **time**? If so, find a short, regular time each day when you can begin to pray. Try to put your prayer time in first, and then build your life around it.

Or is it a lack of **compassion**? Again, begin with prayer. Be honest with God about the way you feel. Start to lift up the names of your friends, family, colleagues and neighbours, and ask Him to break your heart for the things that break His. It's amazing how God can shift your attitude towards someone when you start to pray for them.

Jesus spent a night in prayer – but **you** don't need begin with a whole night. Just make a daily commitment to lift up the people on your BLESS list – asking God for opportunities to bless them. Or saying at the start of each day, "Lord, who can I bless today?"

Begin with prayer – and see what the Father will do.

RESPONSE

If you've not yet done so, take time today to write your BLESS list – people in your life who don't yet know Jesus. Then, simply start praying for these people – and commit to doing the same tomorrow. See what the Lord will do.

NOTES

2 Rhythm of Reaching Out (part two) | Listen

Reading: Luke 18:35-43

DEVOTIONAL

At the heart of today's passage is a simple question from one man to another: "What do you want me to do for you?"

In one sense, the answer to Jesus' question to the blind man seems obvious (I mean, come on, Jesus, surely you can work it out...) And yet, there's something wonderfully honouring in the way Jesus talks with this man.

So often, we rush into judgements about people without listening to their needs and desires. We make assumptions, we give our opinion, we may even offer a solution. But there's a humility in approaching a conversation as a learner rather than an adviser.

Listening means resisting the urge to make a conversation all about me. Listening says: 'right now - in this moment - what **you** have to say is more important than what I have to say'. It's about shifting my focus from me to you.

Of course, listening doesn't always mean agreeing with a person, but it does mean giving them a voice - allowing someone to say what they think and feel. Listening requires a compassion for people, and a security in our own identity.

I wonder how the blind man felt to be asked this question? Conversations like this are memorable. It's rare that we are heard - wholly, genuinely heard. We feel valued, honoured and loved.

And so, as you look to bless people intentionally today, be open to listening to them. Listen to their stories, their hopes and dreams. Listen to their disappointments, their struggles and pain. Listen for any areas where you can serve them. And listen, too, for anything that God wants to say to encourage them.

Jesus heard the man's cry for help - and then asked the simple question. "What do you want me to do for you?"

Perhaps the greatest way you can bless another person today is not by having all the answers. Perhaps it's simply by taking the time to listen.

RESPONSE

Pray for opportunities to listen to the people on your BLESS list. When those opportunities come, listen to their hopes, dreams struggle and pain. What are they facing? How might God want you to help?

NOTES

3 Rhythm of Reaching Out (part two) | Eat together

Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

DEVOTIONAL

Have you ever noticed how much time Jesus spent eating?

Robert Karris, a New Testament scholar, writes that in Luke's Gospel, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal." Why did Jesus do this? Was he wasting time? Or was there something deeper, and more intentional, going on?

We can miss this in a Western culture, but in many parts of the world, eating together is about more than just food.

A shared meal represents friendship and community. It is a powerful expression of welcome and inclusion. So we can learn a lot about Jesus' mission by his choice of dinner companion.

In today's passage, Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners. You can imagine the scene – joyful, raucous, unsanitised – with Jesus right in the middle of it. Of course, the Pharisees didn't like it one bit. In their view, Jesus was mixing with the wrong crowd.

But Jesus spent his time eating with sinners precisely because he knew the mission he was on. He had come to seek and save the lost – and his compassion for people, from all walks of life, led him to share life with them.

So, if eating was part of Jesus' strategy to bless people, then why not **ours** too? What if we became 'missional eaters'? What if we 'ate for Jesus'?

Even in a Western culture, there's something powerful in sharing a meal. Eating together allows for conversation, for intimacy. We find this on Alpha – that as guests eat and share informally around a table, relationships build. People become known.

The book of Revelation, at the end of the Bible, says there's a wedding feast coming for those who follow Jesus. God promises us a feast when Jesus returns. *'Blessed are those invited to the wedding supper of the lamb.'* When Jesus eats with a roomful of sinners, the message is clear: the invitation is for everyone.

If we want to see the people we care about in heaven, what if we got serious about meals? What if we made eating with people a deliberate part of our strategy for blessing them?

RESPONSE

Have a look at the 21 meals you will eat in the next week. Which **one** of these could you use as an opportunity for mission? It doesn't need to be expensive, and eating together is one of the fastest ways to move a relationship to friendship.

NOTES

4 Rhythm of Reaching Out (part two) | Serve

Reading: John 13:1-15

DEVOTIONAL

The reality is, many people would like to be **thought of** as a servant, but no one wants to be **treated** like one. It's why Jesus' actions in today's passage are nothing short of extraordinary.

In our self-obsessed world, we go after and celebrate things like position and power, rank and title. But Jesus turned the whole thing on its head. He demonstrated a totally counter-cultural way to live.

Washing feet wasn't the job of the leader, it was the job of the servant, and the **lowest** servant at that. But someone forgot to book the servant in the upper room that night, and no one was prepared to do the dirty work. **Jesus initiated servant leadership in a way that no one else would.**

In this simple, deliberate act, Jesus demonstrates the servant heart of God (the same servant heart that took Him all the way to the cross), and the humility that Jesus calls his disciples to imitate.

So, how do we serve like this? Well, first, as we saw yesterday, our motivation must be love. If we're going to serve the people around us, we'll need to value people over position. Relationships over reputation.

Secondly, it requires a security in our identity. Jesus could serve others because He was totally secure and confident in who He was. He knew that He had 'come from the Father and would return to the Father', and so He had no need for titles. He had nothing whatsoever to prove.

It is not natural for us to serve other people in this way. The world we live in doesn't promote or celebrate this kind of living. It goes against the grain, it is hard, and everything in us might cry out for recognition and fame.

But it's when we get down and serve the people around us – when we put their needs above our own – that we look most like Jesus.

RESPONSE

Take some time to be honest with God. What do you find hard about serving the people around you? Is there anything you need God to shift in you to make it possible for you to serve others?

NOTES

5 Rhythm of Reaching Out (part two) | Share

Reading: John 9:13–25

DEVOTIONAL

What are some of the most memorable stories you've ever heard?

Perhaps there have been novels you've read by the pool on holiday. Maybe there's a plot of a book or film that has particularly resonated with you. What was it that drew you in?

Stories are provocative and powerful. Beyond just relaying facts and data, stories bring emotion, colour, depth. Stories can be messy and complex... because they tend to be about people and places, not ideas and concepts.

Stories allow people to connect with a message in a deep, meaningful way. And of course, story doesn't have to be confined to fiction.

In today's passage, the Pharisees are incensed that Jesus has healed a man born blind. Intent on finding answers, they question the man, then the man's parents, and then the man again. Each time, the parents and the man respond by just telling the Pharisees what Jesus has done.

They're not interested in arguments about whether or not this man born blind was a sinner. They simply tell their story.

People can argue about doctrine, about where sin comes from, or about why there's suffering in the world. But it's difficult to argue with the story of a life transformed – particularly when that transformed life is standing right there in front of you.

Many people think they don't have an exciting story to tell. And it's true that your story may not be as dramatic as the story of the man born blind. But it's authentic – it's real – and so it's powerful.

Telling the story of the difference that Jesus has made to your life is perhaps **the** most effective way to share the salvation offered through Jesus. So, what's your story? Where is God in it, and what has He done in your life?

When the opportunity comes, tell your story.

RESPONSE

As you pray today for the people on your BLESS list, ask for the chance to love them, to serve them and to share with them. And when the opportunity comes, just tell your story.

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