

Summer 2017

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Living the
BLESS
Lifestyle

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What is the BLESS program?

BLESS is a highly effective method of sharing your faith with others. In an easy to understand acrostic, **BLESS** stands for:

B – *Begin with prayer*

L – *Listen and be aware of the needs of those around you*

E – *Eat with your neighbors, co-workers and friends*

S – *Serve, look for ways to be a servant to others*

S – *Tell your story, share your faith... after you have prayed, listened, had a meal, and served.*

Why are we doing this?

We are blessed and we are called to be a blessing. A large part of how we bless others is to share the good news of Christ with our friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

Our hope is that Westwood attenders would embrace the **BLESS** Lifestyle and understand that it is not only easy to understand, it is something we can do. By actively thinking in terms of **BLESS**ing others daily, it will become a natural outflow of our lives that draws our neighbors, co-workers and relatives to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

In Mathew 28: 19 - 20 Jesus echoes what God has been telling us throughout the Bible. He says, “Go!” Go into all the world and make disciples. He is inviting us to share His heart for reaching the world. In fact, He is also clear that there is no Plan B. We are His strategy for bringing the world into fellowship with Him.

The **BLESS** Lifestyle is meant to give you an easy, natural way to talk to your friends, neighbors and relatives about having a relationship with Christ – to give you a tool to Go.

As you engage with this material, at each step of the way you’ll see that you *can* do this. Whether it is pray, eat, or serve, you will be able to say,

***If that’s what helping
people to find their way back to God
is all about, I can do that!***

Hopefully, engaging in **BLESS** relationships will become your lifestyle. Rather than a short-term program or initiative, **BLESS** is about engaging in redemptive relationships that bring the hope of Christ to others.

Ready to get started?





BEGIN WITH PRAYER

*“Prayer is the real work.
Evangelism is just the mopping up.”*

– ANONYMOUS

Sharing your faith with other people can often seem hard or best left for those with the gift of evangelism, the pastor of the church, or someone, *anyone* other than yourself.

It may be surprising to learn that the first part of evangelism is prayer and often the response you hear when people learn this is – **Well I can do that!**

Yes you can! Begin by making a list of people you might **BLESS**. Making this list may not seem important, but it is! Things get done when we are focused and intentional. List-making is a very helpful technique used by successful people in all walks of life. For us, it can help focus our attention upon those we hope to reach for the Lord.

Start with those in your sphere of influence.

- **Family**
- **Friends**
- **Co-workers**
- **Neighbors**
- **Casual acquaintances** (mailman, gas station clerk, etc.)

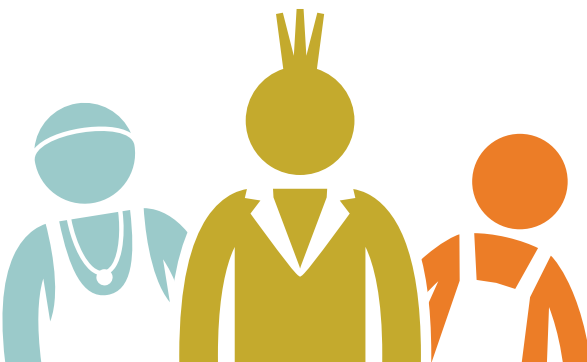
Focus your efforts by investing in 3 people.

- Give priority to those who don't attend a church
- Who are active members of a church/religion but seem more focused on 'religious' things rather than the condition of their heart and what Christ has done.

Husbands and wives may want to have one list as a couple so they can cooperate and focus their efforts together.

Pray for the people on your list daily.

One very powerful truth is that what we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (MATTHEW 18:18). What this “binding” and “loosing” refers to is all the unseen things that hinder people from accepting the gospel. As believers, Jesus has given us authority to “bind” all the unseen hindrances which keep people from the truth. Likewise, He has given us authority to “loose” the power of God through the Holy Spirit. We bind hindrances and we loose the Holy Spirit. In other words, prayer helps make the soil fertile before we start planting seeds.



Be sure to pray each day for the three people you've chosen. We are responsible for prayer and sowing the seeds of truth, but it's God who makes things grow.

Here are some additional things you can pray for:

- That God would give you opportunities to do good for them (1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-7; COLOSSIANS 4:3)
- That God would give you wisdom to make the most of these opportunities (COLOSSIANS 4:4-6)
- That God would give you boldness to say what needs to be said (EPHESIANS 6:18-20; ROMANS 1:16)
- That those you are relating to will have opportunities to hear the truth
- That, as you share your story, those whom you are telling will have open hearts, receptive to hearing your story (MATTHEW 13)



A few prayers to get you started.

These examples aren't meant to be prayers for you to say over and over. Rather, they are meant to get you started on your own, personal prayers for neighbors, work friends and relatives.

For Neighbors

“Lord, I want to lift up my neighborhood to You. I know You want this neighborhood to be touched with Your love. And I know You have placed me here to be Your ambassador – to help my neighbors find their way back to You. I pray You would open up doors for me to talk to everyone about you. But today, I specifically want to pray for _____ and _____ and _____. Would You open a door for me to spend time with them... to listen to them... and to eat with them? Thank you Father, Amen.”

For Co-workers

“Lord, talking to my work friends is challenging. Our work environment does not encourage sharing of our faith. And to be honest, I fear sharing my faith here might endanger my capability to move forward with this company. But I know You have called me to reach out so I want to lift up _____ and _____ and _____. Will You create an opportunity for me to have lunch with these people... so I can ask them how they are doing? And Lord, would You open an opportunity some day for me to tell my story to them? Thank You Lord. Amen.”

For Relatives

“Lord, talking to my family about my relationship with You is hard. I have tried to talk to them – even inviting them to church, but they just don't want to have anything to do with this. Father, would You open a door for me to be able to serve them? I specifically pray for _____ and _____. They seem so distant from You – please provide an opening for me to share more with them. Thank You Father. Amen.”

LISTEN

“Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words.”

– ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

A man was going to a party where he would be meeting his wife’s coworkers for the first time. He rehearsed various scenarios in his mind in which he tried in different ways to impress them.

On the way to the party, the man decided that, instead of trying to impress anyone, he would spend the evening simply listening to them and summarizing what they had just said, responding with phrases like, “I understand what you’re saying – you feel strongly that. . .” and “Let me see if I understand what you mean. . .” He also avoided voicing his own opinions, even though at times it meant biting his tongue to keep from doing so.

Each person he talked to during the evening seemed content to be listened to without interruption. A number of people told his wife what a remarkable person he was. The word “charismatic” was used by one person to describe him, while another said he was one of the most “articulate” people she had ever met.

Could it be that charisma and brilliance have as much to do with how we listen as what we say? Imagine a world where people actually listen to one another, rather than just waiting for the other people to stop talking so they can give their opinion.

– ANNIE B. BOND (8/25/05) www.care2.com

Of course, at some point we will need to talk, but how about focusing on 80% listening?

IT’S HELPFUL TO HAVE SOME OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS IN MIND. YOU CAN FIND SOME GOOD EXAMPLES HERE.

You may feel pressured to correct “wrong thinking” or “errant theology” in your conversations with nonbelievers. Try not to do this! There may be a time for that sometime in the future, but at this point just listen and learn where they are. Then you’ll gain a sense of where they still need to go on their journey.

It’s through listening that we gain an understanding of many things, including their spiritual understanding, their background, the possible ways in which we can serve them, fears, wants, desires, etc. Remember, at this point you are just listening and learning more about them. This builds trust and comfort into the relationship. It is very difficult to be effective in sharing your story if you have not first listened.

Listening is part of sharing my story? I can do that!



What is your favorite memory from childhood?

What was your high school experience like?

How do you manage to raise those children alone?

What do you like to do for fun?

What do you want to be doing in five years?

If you could have the perfect job, what would it be?

What do you believe about God?





EAT

“Sharing meals together on a regular basis is one of the most sacred practices we can engage in as believers. Missional hospitality is a tremendous opportunity to extend the kingdom of God. We can literally eat our way into the kingdom of God! If every Christian household regularly invited a stranger or a poor person into their home for a meal once a week, we would literally change the world by eating!”

– ALAN HIRSCH AND LANCE FORD
RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

Many are surprised to find that sharing a meal with people has a lot to do with evangelism. It’s not hard to imagine some of you saying right now –

Eating is part of sharing my story? I can definitely do that!

So whether you are anchored in a secluded cove on a boat during the summer, having a morning tailgating brunch before a fall high school football game, or having neighbors over for a long winter evening at home, people share the most interesting things about their lives over a meal – particularly if you are listening. Of course one hindrance to sharing a meal is wanting to make it too elaborate and then feeling you don’t have the time to prepare. But the rule of thumb is to keep it simple – save the foie gras and rack of lamb for some other time. After all, it is all about the fellowship around the meal, not the meal itself.

Here are a couple of simple recipes to help you get started. Bon appétit.

RECIPE FOR NON-COOKS!

“...Begin by inviting people over. ORDER PIZZA and serve it with a GREEN SALAD and a BOTTLED SALAD DRESSING... Focus on making people comfortable, on creating a space protected from the rush and chaos of daily life, a space full of laughter and safety and soul... I’m not talking about cooking as performance, or entertaining as a complicated choreography of competition and showing off. I’m talking about feeding someone with honesty and intimacy and love, about making your home a place where people are fiercely protected, even if just for a few hours, from the crush and cruelty of the day.”

– SHAUNA NIEQUIST, BREAD AND WINE



BACON – EGG BAKE

- 6 slices bread, buttered, crust removed, cubed
- 1 lb. bacon, browned
- 1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms, sautéed
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 8 eggs
- 2 cups Half & Half
- 1 tsp. salt

Preheat oven to 325°. Place cubed bread in a 9 x 13” buttered pan. Add crumbled bacon and cheese. Combine beaten eggs, Half & Half and salt. Mix well. Pour egg mixture over bacon, cheese and bread. Cover with plastic wrap and chill overnight. Remove 15 minutes before baking. Bake uncovered for 45 minutes or until set. Let sit, covered, for 15 minutes before serving.

– CRYSTAL SCHACHTERLE

BAKED CHICKEN & ALMOND

- 8 chicken breasts, de-boned & skinned
- ½ cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 cup sliced almonds
- 4 tbsp Worcestershire
- 2 cans cream of mushroom soup
- 1 cup white sherry cooking wine
- 5 tsp. instant minced onions (I use a half-pkg of Lipton’s Onion soup mix)
- 8 oz. sliced mushrooms (optional)

Lay chicken in baking dish. Combine soup, sherry, cheese, onion and Worcestershire sauce, (mushrooms if desired). Pour over chicken. Sprinkle almonds on top. Cover with foil. Bake at 350° for 1½ - 2 hours. Remove foil the last ½ hour. Serve over rice, mashed potatoes or pasta. Enjoy!

– MONICA HELD



SERVE

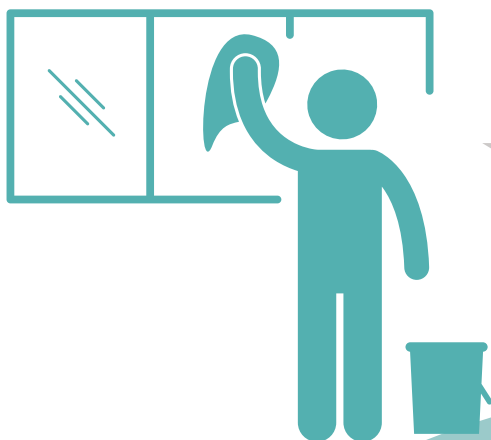
“For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”

– MARK 10:45

We understand our call to be like Jesus. And Jesus was a servant. His entire ministry is a stunning example of serving wherever He went – from His first miracle in Cana, to the feeding of the 5,000, to the simple expression of washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus served, that’s how He lived life.

Given the fact that you are reading a booklet about how to live a **BLESS** lifestyle, chances are you are already serving in many ways – at church, with charitable organizations, or volunteering in numerous other ways.

So are there ways to be more intentional about how and where we serve?



DAVE FERGUSON,
lead pastor of
Community Christian Church
in Chicago and developer
of the **BLESS** Lifestyle,
offers these suggestions
regarding **servicing more
intentionally:**

Proximity

The first place to start serving is with those in close proximity to us. This makes a lot of sense, but so often we think in terms of going on a mission trip or serving people in a shelter in the inner city.

Those things are great, but we start with right where we are.

Look around – to your neighbors, to the people you work with, or how about the parents you sit on the sidelines with while watching soccer?

Start there.

Everyone wants to do something big for the Lord, but that big thing could be right next door.



Perceptively

Listening is seeking to understand the people God has put in close proximity to us. And in coming to know people better it helps us to share perceptively – to be able to speak into their lives.

Isaiah 50:4 says, “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary...”

Listen and then ask the Lord to show you how to perceptively speak into people’s lives.



Personally

We are all familiar with John 11:35: “Jesus wept.” Though famous for being the shortest verse in the Bible it gives us one of the longer views into the heart of Jesus. He wept because He entered personally into the pain of His friends and neighbors.

And as we share our lives with people, that is what the Lord is asking us to do as well – to hurt when they hurt.



Powerfully

Jesus drew on God’s power in numerous ways throughout His life. We see that in the miracles He performed. But we tend to forget that Jesus told His disciples (and us) that we would do even more powerful things.

John 14:12 says, “Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also, and he will do greater works than these...”

As we set about to serve and share our lives with those around us, we can take Jesus at His word and believe that people will, in time, give their lives to Christ. We need to claim that power to share our faith, and to see people drawn to Him.

Learning that serving is part of sharing our story is an **“I can do that”** experience. And serving those in close proximity – perceptively, personally and powerfully, is the way to see the Lord working through you.





SHARE YOUR STORY

“The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.”

– BRANDON SANDERSON

Here we are – the grand finale!

By now you have built a close relationship – and have earned the right to tell your story. Perhaps you have already been asked what makes you different. Whatever the case, this is your time to be more than a good neighbor and tell them the great difference God has made in your life.

When thinking about how to share your story, begin by asking God to bathe the process in His Spirit and give you wisdom as you write it down.

Yes, write it down!

Writing helps clarify our thoughts and focus our attention. Your objective at this point is to write freely without editing – just get all your ideas onto paper.

Think about your life BEFORE, DURING and AFTER coming to Christ.

Outline specific examples that relate to each of the following questions:

1. What was your life like before you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

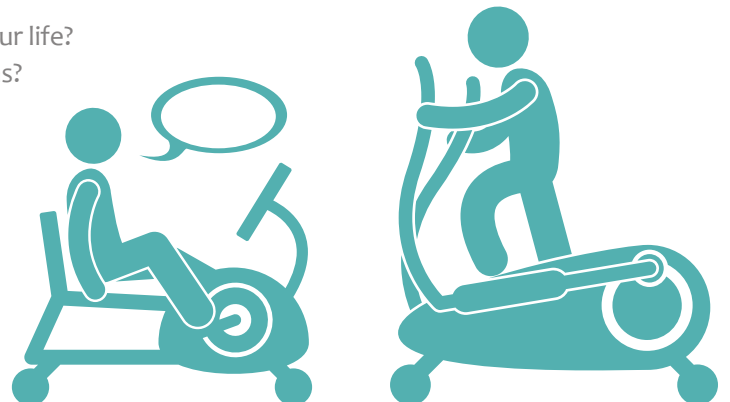
- What were your attitudes, needs and problems?
- What did your life revolve around? What was most important to you?
- Where did you look for security, peace of mind and happiness?

2. How did you come to accept Christ and give Him complete control of your life?

- When did you first hear the gospel?
- When were you first exposed to biblical Christianity?
- What were your initial reactions to Jesus Christ?
- When and why did you begin to feel positively about Christianity?
- What feelings did you struggle with right before your decision?

3. What happened after you trusted Christ?

- What changes did you see in your life?
- In your attitudes? In your actions?
- How long did it take before you noticed any changes?
- What does Jesus Christ mean to you now?



Threading it together...

Once you have thoughts on paper, it's time to get selective. Read through your ideas and, using a highlighter, underline the most important feelings, examples or incidents that relate to each of the three points in the outline at left. Use the ideas you highlight to begin writing your story, and make sure you explain what your life was like before you knew Christ, how you came to know Him, and what your life is like now.

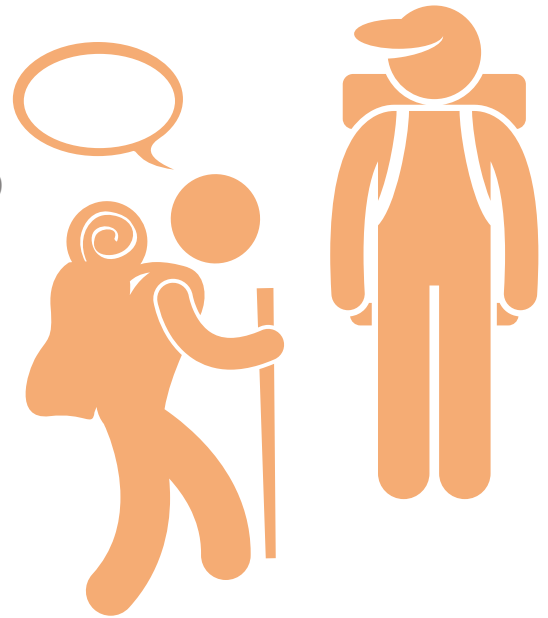


As you consider your story, avoid these things:

- Criticizing the church, organizations or specific people
- Mentioning Denominations (can be confusing or polarizing)
- Glamorizing sinful prior behavior
- Vague terms unless you give concrete explanations (joyful, peaceful, happy, changed, etc.)
- Christian jargon they may not understand (convicted, saved, born again, repentance, etc.)

Guidelines for your story:

- Begin with a story or anecdote that your friend will connect with.
- Be positive throughout.
- Be specific, providing interesting detail.
- Be realistic, knowing that Christ does not remove all of life's problems, but He does walk us through them.
- Communicate biblical principles but use verses sparingly, only when they relate directly to your experience.
- Make sure your conclusion connects to your ongoing faith walk with Christ.
- Set your first draft aside for at least a day. Take another look with a fresh perspective.
- Go over your story several times so you can communicate it naturally.
- A practice conversation with a friend or family member can help with this.





Telling your story...

Now that you have thought through your story, it's time to share it with the individual with whom you have cultivated a relationship. Most will appreciate your willingness to talk openly about your life and it is likely they will value hearing about your personal experience.

Here are some helpful thoughts:

- **Be prayerful.** Respond to God promptings about the right time and place for sharing your story.
- **Be positive.** Smile often and share with enthusiasm, knowing you do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Be natural and conversational.** Never argue about faith or pressure your friend for a decision – the results are up to God!
- **Be open to the Holy Spirit** who will help you relate specifically to the individual with whom you are sharing.
- **Be confident,** knowing that God has used you to model His love, plant a seed, or “water” someone’s growing faith.

I hope you have found the information in this **BLESS** booklet to be helpful. An 8-week sermon series entitled “BLESSed Summer Ever” was presented by the Westwood pastors during the summer of 2014 and provides a scriptural basis for the **BLESS** Lifestyle. If you missed those messages, I invite you to go to the Westwood website and view them. You’ll be encouraged!

I am so excited that we are on this journey together of being used by God to bless others through the sharing of our stories. We, Westwood, and the Kingdom of God will all be changed as a result of us developing and cultivating the **BLESS** Lifestyle.

One final thought –

At our core DNA level, Westwood is a church that is helping people to find their way back to God. We are simply talking to others about their relationship with God, and sharing our faith along the way. As you do this, let me know how it goes. I would enjoy hearing your story of how you are living the **BLESS** Lifestyle.

Send me a note to chaz.nichols@westwoodcc.org



In Him,

Chaz

CHAZ NICHOLS
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