

The Mission Statement of Christ the King Lutheran Church

“Engaging People to Recognize, Receive, and Release the Joy of Christ’s Love.”

Jesus Christ summoned his followers to engage with all people through his words: *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses.”* (Acts 1:8).

When we engage people as witnesses of Jesus Christ, our hope is that they will recognize the joy of Christ’s love, receive it for themselves and release it to others. Yet, when Jesus invited believers to be his witnesses, he did so knowing that not everyone would respond in faith. He told a parable about a farmer who planted seed, but not all of it took root. Yet, that portion which did grow, multiplied greatly. (Matthew 13:1-9)

Because Jesus has called us to be witnesses, and in light of the fact that not everyone will recognize the joy of Christ’s love, the people of Christ the King cheer each other on with these words: “Everyone, every day, everywhere, we are receiving and releasing the joy of Christ’s love.” Like the farmer in the parable who continued to scatter the seed, so we, every day and everywhere, receive and release the joy of Christ’s love.

This six-session guide will introduce to you a simple, Spirit-led process to help you receive and release the joy of Christ’s love. This practice is not burdensome, nor does it require special knowledge or skill. It relies on the power of God to fill you with the joy of Christ’s love so that you overflow with that joy to others, every day, everywhere. The following sessions are written in a manner which encourages group discussion and shared learning. They will be reinforced by a simultaneous sermon series in the fall of 2023. (Archived sermons corresponding to each session, will be available online.)

WHY LEARN A SIMPLE PROCESS TO RELEASE THE JOY OF CHRIST’S LOVE TO OTHERS?

1. Because Jesus invites us to share the joy of His love.
2. Because other believers need to receive the joy of Christ’s love.
3. Because those disconnected from Christ and his church need the joy of Christ’s love.
4. Because God wants everyone, every day, everywhere to receive and release the joy of Christ’s love.

I pray you are filled to all the fullness of Christ, and through you,
Jesus Christ releases the joy of His love every day.
I am blessed to be on the mission with you!

Pastor Al Doering

SESSION 1

THE JOY OF CHRIST'S LOVE

*I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy.
Yes, your joy will overflow!*
(John 15:11, New Living Translation)



INTRODUCTION

Although this guide could be explored alone, there is great value in processing it in a group. The presence of others will give richer insight. Doing this together may also result in stronger bonds of friendship and encouragement to follow Jesus as he calls His people to love one another. If your group is larger, the facilitator may want to break out into smaller groups at appropriate discussion times. This first session assumes that you just received this booklet. All the other sessions are structured for each participant to read the session material before coming to the group.

OPENING PRAYER PROMPT

- *Thank God for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.*
- *Pray that God will use these sessions to help us join Jesus on his mission.*
- *Pray that God's will is done and his kingdom comes as we learn to **BLESS**.*

PICTURE

Residents of Southeast Texas encounter days of extreme heat in the summer. Can you recall what a high heat index day feels like? How would you complete this sentence:

It was so hot that.....

On those days of extreme heat, you probably took extra precautions. Perhaps you arranged your schedule to avoid the sun during the middle of the day. Maybe you focused on drinking more water. You may have been extra diligent about parking in a shady spot. While you could employ these and other safety measures, the plants outside your home could do no such thing. The unbearable temperatures engulfed them. They could not take a break indoors. They were at the mercy of the daily extremes. Yet there was a way to assist these powerless plants. If you kept them hydrated with sufficient water, they could survive. That is why gardeners adjusted their watering schedule. That is why they looked for signs of wilting and made an extra effort to bring relief. Gardeners used their supply of water to help thirsting plants live.

The joy of Christ's love, like life giving water, brings relief to those who are wilting under the heat of life. Jesus put it this way: *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* (John 7:37-38) Perhaps you've experienced this yourself.

The challenges of the day, the burdens of your situation, and your own personal shortcomings can result in anxiety and stress. Maybe you've noticed such stress in the people you encounter in your life. Like a gardener with an abundant supply of water, God wants to pour the joy of Christ's love into your life and into the lives of others.

REFLECT/DISCUSS

- Can you recall a time you have been filled with the joy of Christ's love that it overflows from you?
- How exactly can you overflow to others in a way which feels natural and normal?

WORD

John 15:5-12

⁵ “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

⁶ Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷ But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! ⁸ When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples.

This brings great glory to my Father. ⁹ “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.

¹¹ I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! ¹² This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.”

A. How would you complete this sentence?

“In these verses from John 15, Jesus is inviting me to...”

B. To remain in Christ is to stay connected to him. As you remember that you are a baptized child of God, engage with his Word in worship and prayer, receive forgiveness in Holy Communion, are encouraged and are encouraging others in Christ-centered relationships, you are “remaining” in him.

1. What are the promised outcomes as you remain in Christ?

i. Verse 5 _____

ii. Verse 7 _____

iii. Verse 8 _____

iv. Verse 11 _____

2. What encourages you about these promised outcomes in your life?
What difference do they make?

“Ask for anything you want.” Based on the context of Jesus’s teaching this prayer might look something like this: “Jesus, help me to remain connected to you and produce the fruit you desire. Jesus, fill me with your joy so that I overflow with joy to others.”

Remaining in Christ and overflowing with his joy is not a complex concept. It does not require special skill or knowledge. It is simple. Pray for Christ to fill you, then overflow with the joy of his love to others. Yet as simple as the process may be, the action of overflowing with joy is very hard. It is hard because humans are naturally selfish. It is hard because human nature focuses more on one’s own desires and less on sharing joy with others.

You probably do not have to look deep into your own experiences to recognize how quickly your selfish nature prevents you from overflowing with joy. The good news is that you are not stuck at this place of selfishness. The good news is that through the forgiveness which you have in Christ Jesus, you can turn from your egocentric mindset and be renewed to bless others.

The daily turning from your old self to your new life in Christ looks something like this:

- *Confess your sins.*
- *Receive Christ’s forgiveness.*
- *Express gratitude for all that Christ has done for you.*
- *Engage others with the joy of Christ’s love.*

Jesus clearly stated: I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! Jesus Christ loves you! His promise is that as you receive his love you will be filled with joy to overflowing.

DISCUSSION

Use this grid to reflect on and discuss the impact you have with others.

	The impact on my family	The impact on those beyond my family
When I am selfish		
When I overflow with the joy of Christ's love		

As a follower of Christ, you know the benefits of overflowing with the joy of Christ's love. To help this overflow be more consistent every day you live and everywhere you go, you may want to adopt the simple **BLESS** practices. These practices are:

- B**egin with prayer (God's got this)
- L**isten (Slow down to understand)
- E**at (Hospitality)
- S**erve (Serve them and allow them to serve you)
- S**tory (Share your story about the joy of Christ's love)

As you explore the five elements of **BLESS**, you will learn how to grow in your capacity to overflow with the joy of Christ's love. You will learn to place increasing trust in God as he uses you to make a difference every day, everywhere.



THE POINT

Jesus Christ died and rose again so that you might receive the joy of his love. Jesus Christ envisioned that his followers would be so filled with this joy that they would naturally overflow with that joy to people where they live, work, learn and play. The **BLESS** lifestyle provides a natural rhythm whereby you can recognize, receive, and release the joy of Christ's love.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER

The leader may close this time with a group prayer, thanking God for the privilege of receiving and releasing the joy of Christ's love.

Agree on the next time your group will meet. Prior to that meeting, read Session 2.

*Everyone, every day, everywhere,
we are receiving and releasing the joy of Christ's love!*



SESSION 2

BEGIN WITH PRAYER



The BLESS practices.

Begin with prayer (God's got this)

Listen (Slow down to understand)

Eat (Hospitality)

Serve (Serve them and allow them to serve you)

Story (Share your story about the joy of Christ's love)

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Why **BLESS**? Because people need the joy of Christ's love. Session 1 was about overflowing with the joy of Christ's love. Where did you recognize and receive the joy of Christ's love recently?

Group Note: Sessions 2-6 are arranged so that each person reads the session in advance. In larger groups, the leader may want to take time to review the materials and add their own questions or insights prior to the small group questions labeled "Discussion."



WHAT OFTEN STOPS US FROM RELEASING THE JOY OF CHRIST'S LOVE?

As followers of Jesus we agree that Jesus' mission is to draw all people to himself (John 12:32). We know that Jesus came to "seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10). We know that Jesus painted a picture of the party in heaven when one sinner repents (see the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son in Luke 15). We know that Jesus said: "you shall be my witnesses." (Acts 1:8).

But just because we know that everyone matters and Jesus wants us to be his witness doesn't mean that we are eager to join Jesus in his mission. There are two common reasons for our reluctance to join Jesus and release the joy of His love;

THE FEAR OF REJECTION.

We often think that sharing the good news is about conversion. Such a perspective leads to a mindset that we must convince or win someone over to our opinion. Such an either/or position results in a strong sense that someone will reject us and our message.

THE FEAR OF FAILURE.

We often are afraid that we will say the wrong thing. What if I don't have the right words? Should I leave this to the gifted professionals?



BEGIN WITH PRAYER

We overcome the fear of rejection and the fear of failure by remembering that God's got this. Our job is not to convert someone, nor are we required to have all the right answers. We trust that God is in charge. His Holy Spirit leads people to Jesus. Thus, our first step in **BLESS**ing others is to Begin with prayer. We turn to God in prayer knowing that everything depends on him. We turn to God in prayer because he can overcome our fears. We turn to God in prayer because it is by his power that people will recognize and receive the joy of Christ's love. We turn to God in prayer like this:

GOD, WHERE ARE YOU SHOWING ME YOUR LOVE?

We open our hearts to remember that we are loved unconditionally through Jesus Christ. We are sons and daughters of the King! Our identity is in Christ and his Word, not in ourselves and the world. We pay attention to where God is showing us his love.

GOD, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING TO ME IN YOUR WORD ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

We look to Biblical truths like the one we focused on in Session 1, *"I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you."* (John 15:11-12)

GOD, HOW ARE YOU LEADING ME TO LOVE OTHERS?

We remember that the joy of Christ's love is at the core of our lives and we are the ones through whom Jesus releases this joy to others.

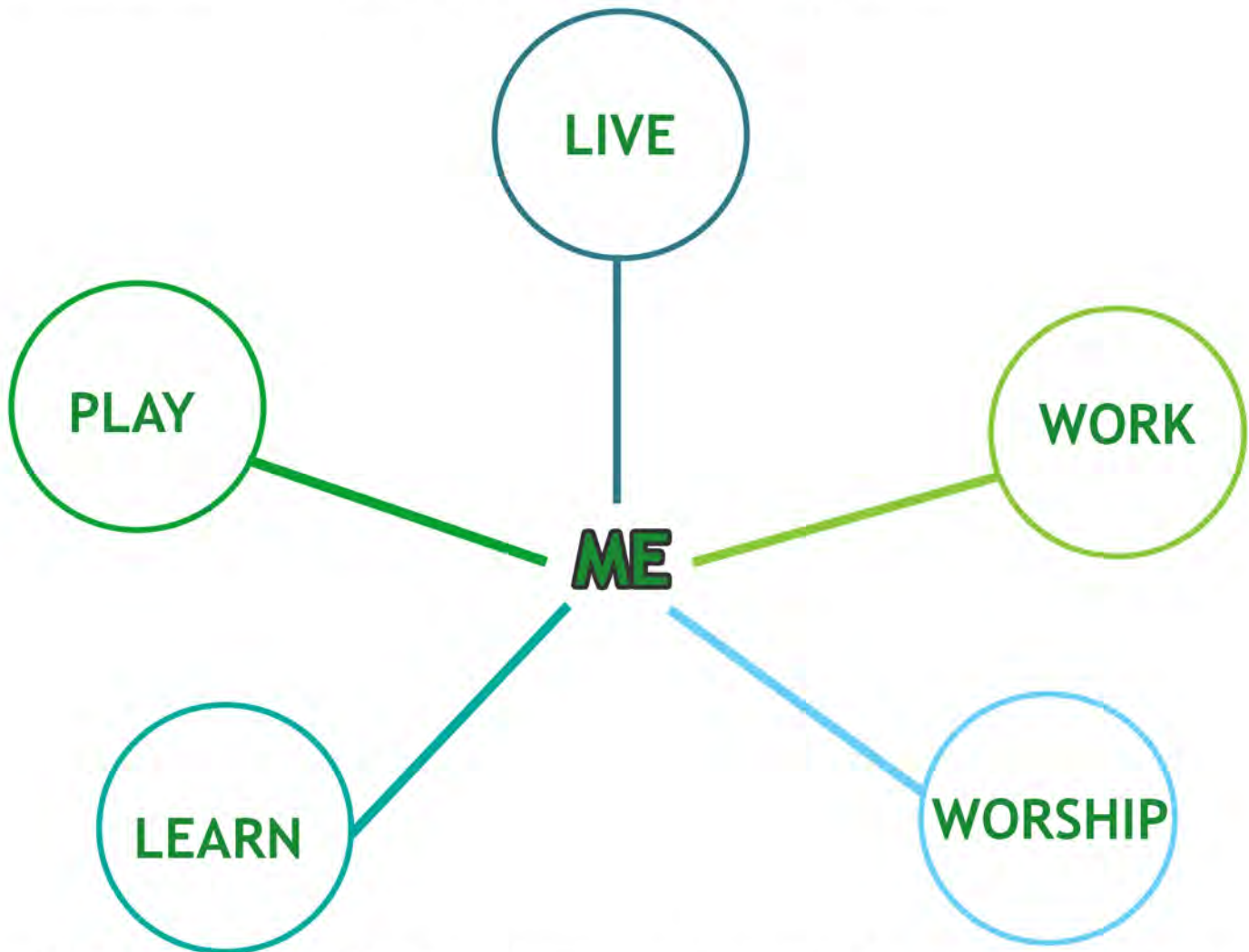
GOD, WITH WHOM DO YOU WANT ME TO SHARE THE JOY OF CHRIST'S LOVE?

We open our eyes to see the people around us, paying attention to those with whom Jesus would have engage in friendships of love and peace.

Each of these four prayers help us align our lives with Jesus' invitation to be his witnesses and join him on His mission. The first two prayers lead to the alignment of our hearts to God's purpose for our lives. The last two focus on the specific steps we can take to **BLESS** others. Who are the others? Jesus referred to them as "neighbors." (Mark 12:31)

PRAYING FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS

Neighbors don't only live near you. The Biblical definition also includes the people you encounter where you play, learn, work and worship. Imagine your neighbors as the people you regularly encounter in your "relationship circles". Here is an illustration of those neighbor groups in your life.



Which of these neighbors does Jesus want you to love? In one sense he wants you to love all of them, but many of those neighbors are in passing relationships. You don't have an ongoing connection to them. Although you can show loving concern to a classmate, the checker at the grocery store, or a fellow employee, if the relationship is minimal (passing) it may be difficult to **BLESS** them. On the other hand there are neighbors in your circles with whom you have a more permanent relationship because you encounter them often. God may want you to **BLESS** people in both groups (passing and permanent). But due to the **BLESS** lifestyle it is normal that those whom you **BLESS** will become more permanent.

PRAYING FOR “PERSONS OF PEACE.”

When you are looking for an answer to the prayer: “God, with whom do you want me to share the joy of Christ’s love”? Keep the following teaching from Jesus in mind. When Jesus sent 72 of his followers to be his witnesses (Luke 10), he told them to look for the person of peace. Here is what Jesus said:

“Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’ If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you.” Luke 10:5-6

The person of peace is the one who welcomes you, shows interest in you, pauses to talk to you, etc. Perhaps it’s the friend at school who likes to hang out with you. Maybe it’s the neighbor who often stops to talk to you. Maybe it’s the co-worker who seeks you out regularly. Trust that God has already placed people in your life with whom he wants you to share the joy of Christ’s love. They may or may not be like you. They may or may not share your interests. They may or may not agree with your opinions. Yet they keep showing up and the Holy Spirit keeps nudging you to pray for them.

How do you determine if someone is not a person of peace? Jesus said: “If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not the blessing will return to you.” You’ve attempted to bless them, but they have turned their back on your blessing. Instead of fixating on their response, recognize that God may not have provided a connection with that person. Take your attitude of blessing and move along to share it with others.

THE POINT

You have received the joy of Christ’s love. God wants all people to know that joy. The **BLESS** lifestyle relies on God to guide and use us. This pattern for overflowing with the joy of Christ’s love **“Begin with prayer.”**

1. God, where are you showing me your love?
2. God, what are you saying to me in your Word about following Jesus?
3. God, how are you leading me to love others?
4. God, with whom do you want me to share the joy of Christ’s love?

DISCUSSION

(Smaller groups may work well for this section.)

1. What jumped out at you in the materials for this session?
2. This session emphasized that instead of thinking about converting someone we think about **BLESS**ing them. What do you appreciate about this distinction?
3. What comes to mind when you think of **BLESS**ing others with the joy of Christ's love?
4. How does "begin with prayer" make sense to you as a daily first step in **BLESS**ing others?
5. When you consider potential "persons of peace" in your relationship circles, who is the Holy Spirit pointing out to you? Why do you sense they may be "persons of peace"?

WRAP-UP

If you subdivided into smaller groups for discussion, call the groups back together and ask them to tell the entire group some key insights they discussed. Process these insights as time allows.

PRAYER

Close with a prayer thanking God that he is the one who will guide this **BLESS**ing lifestyle. Ask him to continue to encourage you to always begin with prayer.

Agree on the next time your group will meet. Prior to that meeting, read Session 3.

SESSION 3

LISTEN



The BLESS practices

B egin with prayer	(God's got this)
L isten	<i>(Slow down to understand)</i>
E at	(Hospitality)
S erve	(Serve them and allow them to serve you)
S tory	(Share your story about the joy of Christ's love)

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Why **BLESS**? Because people need the joy of Christ's love.

Session 2 emphasized that we always begin with prayer.

Session 3 emphasizes the importance of listening as a form of compassionate love.

OPENING PRAYER

Group Note: Sessions 2-6 are arranged so that each person reads the session in advance. In larger groups, the leader may want to take time to review the materials and add their own questions or insights prior to the small group questions labeled "Discussion."

HE HAD COMPASSION. MATTHEW 9:36

The power to bless our neighbor begins with God's love for us in Jesus Christ. One of the ways the Gospel writers used to express Jesus' love is with the word: **COMPASSION**. *"When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* (Matthew 9:36) *"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her..."* (Luke 7:13) Jesus was sensitive to the emotional needs of people. The initial action which allows someone to be compassionate is to listen. Listening is an expression of love.

TO LISTEN IS TO LOVE

Listening is one of the 5 practices which help you **BLESS** your neighbor with the joy of Christ's love. When you listen, you express compassion. When you listen, you show that you care. When you listen, you communicate that your neighbor has value.

You've probably experienced moments where someone heard you, but they did not *listen* to you. They were not sensitive to your situation. On the other hand, you may also recall times when someone paid attention to what you were saying, and you felt understood. They listened to you. Now, turn that around. Have there been times when you did not listen well? What was the response of the person who was talking to you? Consider the times you did listen well. How did that make a difference in your relationship with the person who was talking?

Listening with compassion and sensitivity is difficult because of our sinful nature. Our tendency to be selfish causes us to listen poorly. We hear someone's words and before they finish talking, we often have already formulated our response. Sometimes the response is to tell our situation instead of trying to better understand theirs. Sometimes our response is to provide a solution to their problem, even though they did not ask for a solution. Poor listening often prevents us from **BLESSING** our neighbor because it communicates that they are not valuable enough for us to seek to understand them.



Ultimately, we learn to listen well when we remember that our identity is centered in Jesus Christ. We do not need to promote ourselves. We are children of God. We do not need to justify our position. We are accepted and loved unconditionally in Christ. Because we overflow with the joy of Christ's love we have the capacity to be compassionate and listen with sensitivity.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO LISTEN WELL TO YOUR NEIGHBOR

1. Pray. Ask God to forgive your selfish nature. Ask God to help you see that every person has value. Ask God to help you see your neighbor as he sees them.

2. S l o w d o w n. Listening takes time.

Remember that you are praying for God to show you persons of peace. You are praying for God to go before you to connect you with people who will receive the joy of Christ's love through you. You are on a mission with Jesus! This mission is important. Thus, your investment of time is critical.

3. Avoid trying to convert or convict them of your truth.

Our mission is to engage with them so that they recognize and receive the joy of Christ's love. Remember the adage: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

4. Pause before you respond. Notice the feeling behind their story.

5. Try using the phrase: "Can you tell me more about that?"



LISTEN WELL TO THESE PEOPLE

On the one hand we want to listen well to everyone. But because we are praying for God to show us persons of peace, we will want to be attentive to opportunities to spend time listening to those whom God is highlighting. Think of your relationship circles (session 2 introduced this concept).



When you gather with others for worship, pay attention to people with whom God is wanting you to engage. When you encounter someone in your neighborhood, ask God if he wants you to spend more time with them to hear their story. In all of your relationship circles, be attentive. Let it be normal for you to pray for God to point out those with whom he wants you to pause, so that you can listen. Trust him to guide you.

A LISTENING ATTITUDE

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy; complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4

THE POINT

God wants you to engage others so that they recognize, receive and release the joy of Christ's love. You engage well when you care. Listening is essential to caring.

DISCUSSION

(Smaller groups may work well for this section.)

1. What jumped out at you in the materials for session 3?
2. When is it hard for you to be a good listener?
3. Who has been a good listener for you?
4. How does your identity in Christ help you to listen well to your neighbor?
5. How do you sense that God is listening to you?

Summary of the first two practices.

Begin with prayer.

1. God, where are you showing me your love?
2. God, what are you saying to me in your Word about following Jesus?
3. God, how are you leading me to love others?
4. God, with whom do you want me to share the joy of Christ's love?

Listen (S l o w d o w n to understand.)

WRAP-UP

If you subdivided into smaller groups for discussion, call the groups back together and ask them to tell the entire group some key insights they discussed. Process these insights as time allows.



CLOSING PRAYER

Close with a prayer thanking God that he helps you to listen to others. Ask the Lord to increase our capacity to slow down and understand the needs of those he wants us to **BLESS**. Ask him to continue to encourage you to always begin with prayer.

Agree on the next time your group will meet. Prior to that meeting, read Session 4.

Through the week, pray.

God, where are you showing me your love?

God, what are you saying to me in your Word about following Jesus?

God, how are you leading me to love others?

God, with whom do you want me to share the joy of Christ's love?



SESSION 4

EAT



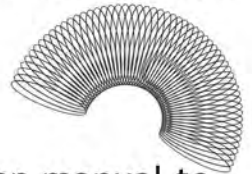
The BLESS practices

B egin with prayer	(God's got this)
L isten	(Slow down to understand)
E at	(Hospitality)
S erve	(Serve them and allow them to serve you)
S tory	(Share your story about the joy of Christ's love)

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Why **BLESS**? Because people need the joy of Christ's love.

As we move to the third of our **BLESS** practices it is good to note that these practices do not always occur sequentially. Their pattern is less linear and more circular, like a slinky. A slinky has repeating circles which interact in random ways with each other.



As God leads you to **BLESS** people you are not following an instruction manual to convert someone. You are not keeping a list where you check the box. When you **BLESS** others you are building relationships of joy based on Christ's love. Such relationships are Spirit led and not human driven. Let go of a need to "get onto the next step". Keep praying. Be curious about what God is doing between you and others.

OPENING PRAYER

Group Note: Sessions 2-6 are arranged so that each person reads the session in advance. In larger groups, the leader may want to take time to review the materials and add their own questions or insights prior to the small group questions labeled "Discussion."

JESUS OFTEN SHARED MEALS

There are many references in the Gospels to Jesus eating with people in a context of hospitality. His first miracle was at a wedding feast, where he made sure there was no shortage of wine (John 2:1-11). He ate with sinners and tax collectors. When a large crowd needed food, Jesus performed a miracle so that no one would be hungry (Matthew 14:13-21). When he needed to speak to his disciples about his upcoming death, he hosted a last supper. Following the example of Jesus, we can explore how hospitality, including eating together, can **BLESS** others.

The story of Zacchaeus - Luke 19:1-9

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

How did Jesus show hospitality?

How did Zacchaeus show hospitality?

What changes occurred because of this hospitable environment?

What does this story tell you about being open to the hospitality of others?

EATING TOGETHER - AN ACT OF HOSPITALITY

There is no direct instruction from the Bible about eating together to build joy filled relationships. But, there are many examples, as referenced in the previous paragraph. These examples underlie a clear message from God's Word. Followers of Jesus are to show hospitality to others. Hospitality is the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. Words like: welcoming, friendliness, warmth, kindness openness, non-judgmental, cordiality and generosity are synonymous with hospitality. Imagine a world where believers create hospitable environments and neighbors experience the noticeable joy of Christ's love. The sharing of food enhances that experience because it expresses hospitality in a tangible action.

What does it look like to express hospitality by eating with the persons of peace God is identifying?

A morning cup of coffee or afternoon iced tea. Lunch at a restaurant. A backyard BBQ. A potluck for the neighborhood, baseball team, or church group. As you start to think of the possibilities, you may also want to consider the value of hosting such hospitality moments with another believer. When Jesus sent his disciples out to connect with the disconnected, he sent them in pairs. There is encouragement and support when doing hospitality together.

PRACTICING HOSPITALITY.

For some believers this is a natural gifting. They seem to be pre-wired for hosting a meal and inviting neighbors into their space. For other believers it may not be so likely, due to their context and circumstances. For those with an inclination toward hospitality and for those less inclined, it is important to remember the *why* of hospitality. We are not hospitable simply to have a good time. Nor do we avoid hospitality because of some excuse. The reason we are hospitable is because such an open and generous approach toward our neighbors provides the setting for helping them to recognize, receive and release the joy of Christ's love. So many of our acquaintances are burdened with the cares of this world and the negativity of our culture. When we open our lives to them, and welcome them into places of friendliness and warmth, they can experience the joy of Christ's love.

The why of hospitality is expressed well in these passages from God's Word.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 3:8-9)

- Hospitality provides a context to express unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness.

Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:1-2)

- Hospitality causes us to pay attention to strangers (those outside of our tight friendship circles), trusting that God might have a "divine appointment" in mind.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. (Romans 12:13).

- Hospitality helps open our eyes to the needs of the saints (other believers) and leads us to welcome them.

ROADBLOCKS TO HOSPITALITY

"I don't know how to cook. I don't like to have people in my home. My home is not nice enough. I don't have time." When you encounter such sentiment, talk to God about it. He might help you see that going out or ordering in may overcome your lack of culinary skill. He may help you let go of comparing your home to others, as you recognize that he is calling you to release the joy of Christ's love. Remember, we use the word Eat because it fits the acronym **BLESS**. But **Eat** really is best understood in light of the broader concept of hospitality.



THE POINT

Followers of Jesus are called to be hospitable. Being hospitable means our schedules and plans are altered for the sake of others. In such hospitable settings the joy of Christ's love can be tangibly expressed.

DISCUSSION

(Smaller groups work well for this section.)

What jumped out for you in the materials for this session? Why?

If you could eat anywhere for a meal, where would you go?

What is one of the more memorable meals you've experienced?

Why is showing hospitality an effective way to **BLESS** someone?

Who has shown hospitality to you?

What did you appreciate about their actions?

How did their actions affect your relationship with them?



Which of these three passages speaks to you most significantly today?

- a. *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 3:8-9)*
- b. *Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:1-2)*
- c. *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. (Romans 12:13).*

Who are the persons of peace God has been showing you?

What do you sense God would have you do to show them hospitality?

WRAP-UP

If you subdivided into smaller groups for discussion, call the groups back together and ask them to tell the entire group some key insights they discussed. Process these insights as time allows.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close with a prayer thanking God for the hospitality you have received from him. Ask him to guide you to explore opportunities for hospitality daily.

Agree on the next time your group will meet. Prior to that meeting, read Session 5.

Through the week, pray.

God, where are you showing me your love?

God, what are you saying to me in your Word about following Jesus?

God, how are you leading me to love others?

God, with whom do you want me to share the joy of Christ's love?

SESSION 5

SERVE

SERVE

The BLESS practices

B egin with prayer	(God's got this)
L isten	(Slow down to understand)
E at	(Hospitality)
S erve	<i>(Serve them and allow them to serve you)</i>
S tory	(Share your story about the joy of Christ's love)

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Why **BLESS**? Because people need the joy of Christ's love.

Where have you given or received hospitality lately?

Have you seen any specific impacts on your relationships as you show hospitality?

In session 5 we explore a variation of hospitality, **Serve**.

OPENING PRAYER

Group Note: Sessions 2-6 are arranged so that each person reads the session in advance. In larger groups, the leader may want to take time to review the materials and add their own questions or insights prior to the small group questions labeled "Discussion."

JESUS SERVED AND SERVES US

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

As a follower of Jesus Christ, you are aware of how your Lord served you. You know that he died and rose again for you. You know that he forgives you and promises life forever. You know that he did this as a gift of grace. You know that there is nothing you did to deserve his unconditional love. You are also aware that Jesus not only served you, but he also continues to serve you.

He serves you through the encouragement of His Word. He forgives your sins daily. He fills you with power and peace when you receive his presence in Holy Communion. This servant orientation of Jesus translates into a servant lifestyle for all who follow him. Jesus served you. Jesus serves you. Jesus calls you to serve. Here are a few of the many Biblical passages which reinforce the invitation to serve. Take a moment to reflectively read them.

Matthew 5:16

“...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Mark 10:42-44

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

Matthew 25:35-36

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

Galatians 5:13

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.

1 Peter 4:10

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

Does one or two of the passages stand out for you today?

What do you think God wants you to know?

SERVING OTHERS AND THE BLESS LIFESTYLE

It is normal for believers to serve. It's the Jesus way! Even though it is common for Christians to serve, it is good to acknowledge some **"roadblocks"** which believers must navigate. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates some of these roadblocks.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied,

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

Roadblock #1 - A hard heart

When the priest and Levite came upon the injured victim they crossed to the other side of the road and hurried along. They saw the need. They did not care. Their hearts were hard.

Roadblock #2 - Time

The Samaritan could have made an excuse that he was too busy to stop and assist. But he didn't choose to make an excuse. He delayed his journey until the wounded man was in a place of safety and care. He overcame the roadblock of time.

Roadblock #3 - Cost

The Samaritan did not say: "I can't spare my oil and wine to treat his wounds." He did not say, "I don't want to pay for this man's lodging." He generously helped. He overcame the roadblock of cost.

Roadblock #4 - Prejudice

The context of the parable suggests that the injured man was a Jew. The animosity of Jews toward Samaritans was long and strong. But the Samaritan did not make the excuse: "this man's group hates me, I'm not going to help him." He overcame the roadblock of prejudice.

Which of these roadblocks to hospitality have you seen in your life?

How has God helped you to overcome one or more of these roadblocks?

RECEIVING THE SERVICE OF OTHERS

As you are **BLESS**ing others it is important to note that not only will you find ways to serve the people God places in your life, but you will also learn to receive help from them. Jesus taught about this when he described the person of peace in Luke 10.

“Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’ If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. Don’t move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don’t hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay.” Luke 10:5-9

Jesus said that those who are open to receiving God’s peace, will often aid those who are bringing them God’s peace. Consequently, when you pray about serving others, be aware that God may want the “others” to serve you. It will strengthen your relationship and it can help these “**persons of peace**” to experience the joy of Christ’s love as they learn to serve.

BE CURIOUS ABOUT SERVING

IT IS MORE THAN A “TASK.”

Sometimes believers may approach serving others as a project or job with the implied goal of fixing or improving another. To counter this tendency, try being curious about serving. Ask God questions about the person and how he would have you serve. Ask God to help you be humble to receive the assistance which these persons may provide. Serving is about relationship building. Be curious about how God wants to move you out of your comfortable patterns to share the joy of Christ’s love by serving and being served.

IT IS UNIQUE.

Serving happens according to the gifts and abilities God has given. “**Serve**” looks different based on the person doing the serving. Be careful about the temptation to try to serve in ways that do not align with your abilities. On the other hand, be curious as to whether God might be teaching you something new about serving. Ultimately, trust God. Ask for his guidance. Rely on your sense of what he wants you to do.



THE POINT:

Jesus served and serves you. He invites you to serve others. Serving is about building relationships of trust where the joy of Christ's love overflows.

DISCUSSION.

(Smaller groups may work well for this section.)

1. How have you served someone recently? How was your act of service tailored to the specific needs of the one you served?
 2. Take a moment to consider how someone has served you recently? What did they do? How was it unique?
 3. Look back at the roadblocks, presented previously, from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Which roadblock (s) are significant for you? What do you think God wants you to know about overcoming that roadblock? What else gets in the way of you serving others?
- 

4. What challenges do you see in the following words from Jesus? What impact do these words have on your life?

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.” (Mark 5:22-24)

WRAP-UP

If you subdivided into smaller groups for discussion, call the groups back together and ask them to tell the entire group some key insights they discussed. Process these insights as time allows.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray for God to help you be curious about people you might serve. Ask for his help so that you serve and receive the service of others.

NEXT TIME

Agree on the next time your group will meet. Prior to that meeting, read Session 6.

Through the week, pray.

God, where are you showing me your love?

God, what are you saying to me in your Word about following Jesus?

God, how are you leading me to love others?

God, with whom do you want me to share the joy of Christ's love?

SESSION 6

STORY



The BLESS practices

B egin with prayer	(God's got this)
L isten	(Slow down to understand)
E at	(Hospitality)
S erve	(Serve them and allow them to serve you)
S tory	<i>(Share your story about the joy of Christ's love)</i>

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Why **BLESS**? Because people need the joy of Christ's love.

What are you discovering about your capacity to serve others? (Session 5).

Session 6 focuses on telling how your story has been impacted by the story of Jesus.

OPENING PRAYER

Group Note: Sessions 2-6 are arranged so that each person reads the session in advance. In larger groups, the leader may want to take time to review the materials and add their own questions or insights prior to the small group questions labeled "Discussion."

YOUR LIFE REVEALS YOUR STORY

The goal of the **BLESS** lifestyle is to engage people to recognize, receive and release the joy of Christ's love. This happens in all your relationship circles. This happens as you interact with those connected to Christ and his church, and with those disconnected from Christ and his church. As you **BLESS** others, the Holy Spirit helps them to recognize the joy of Christ's love in you! Because you listen to them, show them hospitality, and serve them, they notice. Because you forgive as Christ forgave you, because you are kind and considerate, because your humble nature is guided by the Spirit of Jesus, you are a living, breathing story of the joy of Christ's love. As your daily Christ-like demeanor reveals your story, you will also encounter moments where the Holy Spirit leads you to tell your story.

YOUR WORDS TELL YOUR STORY

In addition to your lifestyle, your story is also expressed through your words. As you tell what Jesus has done and is doing for you, you are telling your story. As you express the daily rhythm of seeking God and receiving forgiveness you are telling your story. As you explain the hope that you have in Christ, you are telling your story.

Here are some guiding words from the Bible which help to describe the value of believers speaking about the joy of Christ's love to others.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

We are ambassadors (representatives) of Christ. We speak on behalf of Jesus Christ, telling people how they can be reconciled to God as they put their hope in the forgiveness which Jesus accomplished on the cross.

"You shall be my witnesses." (Acts 1:8).

We are witnesses for Christ. We tell what we have experienced and know to be true.

"...if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it." (1 Peter 3:15)

We are ready to explain the hope that we have in Christ.

STORYTELLER

When you use words to explain your hope as a believer, do so as a storyteller. Too often believers resist speaking about their faith because they feel they need to convince, persuade, influence, or convert others. Some who claim Christ act as if they need to “beat someone with the Bible” as they argue for the truth. There is a place for debate about the claims of Christianity, but rarely is that the nature of the discussion when you are **BLESS**ing someone with the joy of Christ’s love. (The notes at the end of this **BLESS** study has resources if you want to explore how to specifically present Christianity’s truth claims).

YOUR STORY SPREADS THE SEED OF GOD’S WORD

As you pray for your neighbors, listen to them, eat with them (hospitality), and serve them, God builds joy which you share together. In these relationships you are releasing the joy of Christ’s love through your actions and your words. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you to verbally tell your story. An inspiring parable from Jesus puts the telling of your story into perspective. It is the parable of the growing seed in Mark 4:26-29.

Jesus also said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, while he’s asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.”

When you tell the story of Jesus in your life, you are like the farmer planting the seed. Just as the farmer did not understand how the seed grew, so followers of Jesus do not know how the Holy Spirit grows faith through the seed of God’s Word. You plant the seeds, by sharing your story of Jesus. God causes the growth.



WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

Every believer is unique. Yet there are some universal elements which are in the story of most followers of Christ. Consider the following general “story prompts.”

Spend some time answering the questions.

Remember, this is the story of Jesus in your life.

- Who is Jesus to me?
 - How does Jesus change my life daily?
 - Why am I grateful to be a child of God through Jesus Christ?
 - How does God lead me back to joy when I have messed up?
 - What is one specific instance where I have seen Jesus at work?
- 



POINT

Your lifestyle and your words release the seeds of the joy of Christ's love. Trust the Holy Spirit to cause the seed to grow.

DISCUSSION.

(Smaller groups may work well for this section.)

What jumped out at you as you read Session 6?

What do you sense God is saying to you about loving your neighbor by using the **BLESS** practices?

Based on what you wrote in response to the "Story prompts" (previous page), practice telling your story to the others in your group.

Give encouragement and feedback to each other as you listen well.

WRAP-UP

If you subdivided into smaller groups for discussion, call the groups back together and ask them to tell the entire group some key insights they discussed. Process these insights as time allows.





COMMITMENT TO THE BLESS LIFESTYLE.

As God is leading you to receive and release the joy of Christ's love, consider this prayer of commitment.

Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you that you saved me and fill my life with the joy of your love. Empower me by your Holy Spirit that every day, and everywhere, I **BLESS** others through these simple practices. Let my life overflow constantly with the joy of your love. I sign my name and date this prayer as a reminder of this commitment. Amen.

_____ Date _____

CONTINUE TO BEGIN WITH PRAYER AS YOU SEEK TO BLESS OTHERS.

God, where are you showing me your love?

God, what are you saying to me in your Word about following Jesus?

God, how are you leading me to love others?

God, with whom do you want me to share the joy of Christ's love?



END NOTES:

For further reading and exploring of this life of **BLESS**ing others:

Doering, Ted. "Walking Together: Simple Steps for Discipleship." *Concordia Publishing House*

Finke, Greg. *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary*. Tenth Power, 2014.

McDowell, Josh, and Sean McDowell. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World*. Thomas Nelson, 2017.

Peeples, Matt, and Trey Sansom. "SHARE THE UNCHANGING GOSPEL IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD." *The Kairos Network - The Missionary Pathway*, thekairosnetwork.com/missionarypathway.

STROBEL, LEE. *Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity*. ZONDERVAN, 2022.

Archived Sermons on these six sessions will be available at christ4u.net