

# 5 Simple ways to BLESS

## 3. Serve and Story

July 1-2, 2017

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Good morning, Crossroads! My name is Christy Gibas, and I'm the Weirton Campus Pastor. I am thrilled you are here worshipping with us today as we wrap up our series, "5 Simple Ways to Bless." This has been a great series that reminds us that we can bless people in the places that we, (say it with me) where we live, work, and play. That's right. You guys are catching on to this rhythm of blessing. Blessing is something we can do as individuals...and it's something we can do in our small groups.

We are going to look at a few passages of scripture today. I invite you to follow along in your Bible or on your smart device. If you would like a Bible, raise your hand and someone will gladly bring you one.

The heart of blessing others means there are no strings attached. We have no expectations other than to be a light in a dark place. When we bless others, we can fall into the trap of thinking we must "close the deal." But we don't. People do not want to become our projects. We get this, "us vs. them" mentality. It's not us vs. them, it's us FOR them! How exciting that God allows us to partner with Him by serving those He loves!

In week one, Pastor Steve taught from Genesis 12. This was a covenant passage. A covenant is an unconditional relationship. In this scripture, we see that God makes a covenant with Abram. Let's look at it again.

**Genesis 12:2-3** <sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.<sup>[a]3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

This theme of blessing runs through the entire Bible. Let's play a game. Hands up...how many occurrences of blessing are there in the Bible? This is going to be participation weekend! I'm a little shy, so I need to know you are out there. So, hands up! Wave at me, great. Put your hands down when you think we've gone over the blessing limit. 50? 25? 75? 100? 150? 200? 300? 350? 450? 500? That's it! Over 500 times! That's a lot of times.

Abram was a blessing so others would be blessed through him. And God does the same for us. We are blessed to bless others. God is faithful to continue to create opportunities to bless others as we do our part and continue to bless.

It's living in this space of this beautiful rhythm. And the only way it won't work is if we won't learn the rhythm of bless. It's an everyday, continual praying, "God what are you up to here and how can I be a part of it?" This prayer gets us to notice things we

normally wouldn't. We are in rhythm. The rhythm of blessing is simply learning when to be on and learning when to be off. Rhythm is that simple.

To apply this rhythm of blessing in our lives we are going to:

B-Begin with prayer...pray, "Lord, what would it look like in my school if Jesus went here?" Pray, "Father, show me what my neighborhood would look like if Jesus lived next door." "Holy Spirit, who in my community are you working with and how can I help?"

L-Listen.... we are going to listen to people. Build relationships; learn what they love and learn their pain point. Don't worry... it won't take long; people love to tell you what's bugging them...and don't let it annoy you. Pain points are opportunities.

E- don't be shy...yell it out. Who remembers? Eat...oh yeah...we have some foodies in the room, my kind of people. We are going to pick up that lost art of connecting with people over a meal...the way Jesus did. We are simply modeling Jesus.

S-Serve, we will meet needs in the Name of Jesus.

S-Story; we will not miss the opportunity to make Jesus famous.

So, today's big idea is: **Saved people; serve people, and share their story.**

Since you probably don't hear about Weirton a lot and somebody gave me the floor, I want to share some neat things that they are doing to be a blessing. Back in October, one of our small groups that happens to be a group of men contacted me to come to their group and listen to their idea. They loved the idea of FOCUS...but thought, how can we engage our community more than just one time a year as a group? A lot of thought and planning has gone into reaching out into the community and serving...which is what we are talking about today...serving and sharing our story. After six long months of planning and gathering other small groups in and people from the church, "Love the Ohio Valley" was born. This is a missional community that now has about 40 people consisting of 4 teams, several leaders who reach out to serve the community. We just kicked off with our first projects last month. They replaced some outdoor carpet on a porch, fixed a retaining wall, and weeded and planted a garden. There is a fence job and a shed repair coming up...and these men are doing what men love to do...fix stuff and get 'r done.

There is something for everyone here. Small groups can engage with one another and it creates a great opportunity for someone sitting in the seats that thinks to themselves, "I'm not ready to try a small group yet, but I can help this small group do a project."

When we apply these BLESS rhythms to our lives, we will be compelled to action. Blessing others means we look for opportunities to **serve**. We are told this in the

book of James. **James 2:26 (NIV)** <sup>26</sup> *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

The Bible tells us that we really don't have faith at all if we have no deeds. That it is **because** we have faith, not because we are nice people, or not because we want to look good, but **because** we have faith we will have deeds! In fact, we must! James compares faith without serving to a dead body! It's empty with no substance!

And what does it mean to have faith? It means that I have made Christ Lord in my life. It means that I utter the same words that Christ spoke to the Father, "not my will but your will be done." It means that I can't keep my blessing to myself any longer. In fact, we will talk about this; keeping a blessing ruins it!

Faith is having a complete trust, complete confidence, that we can exercise our blessing that God has given to us. We believe that blessing is abundant, with no lack or scarcity. Faith means we have complete peace that we can obey God with our resources and time because He is the giver of our blessings.

When we have faith, we believe God blesses us for us to bless others. And we apply this rhythm to our lives and go on the most amazing journey we will ever take. A life of living in the place of blessing, where God pours out on us and we pour out on others. It's an adventure that I'm inviting you on! I can't promise many things, but I can promise living in a place of blessing is exciting.

So, if you name the Name of Jesus as Lord in your life, that means you are a person of faith; you are saved. You will spend your days intentionally growing to be more like Jesus and you get to spend all of eternity in His presence! This is exciting stuff! This is good news! And because we know this good news that is the gospel, we share this with those who do not yet know! There are many who do not know the truth of the gospel, and we are part of God's grand design to bring others to faith in Jesus. Serving means we go from **task orientation to relationship orientation**.

So back to our folks in Weirton, if all they do is plant a garden and go home, we've missed a key piece of the puzzle. See, God doesn't want us to serve people because he's hoping everyone gets their stuff done. God wants us to serve people to point to Jesus. We aren't just here to fix a fence; we are serving to love people and build relationships, because the fact is that a fence is temporary, but people are eternal. We need to focus on what matters, on what lasts.

When we move from task orientation to relationship orientation and focus on eternal things, we begin to ask questions:

- Who are the people we are serving?
- What is God already doing in their lives?
- How can I partner with God in that?

This requires us to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. There is no set formula other than the same willingness of Christ, “not my will but yours.”

What are the reasons to serve? First, **we serve Christ when we serve others.**

**Colossians 3:23-24** <sup>23</sup> *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,* <sup>24</sup> *since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

Second, we need to bless others by serving because it's good for us; **serving transforms us.** In **Romans 12:10**, the Bible calls us to “*be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*” If we want to see transformation, we will obey and serve. Serving requires us to put others first. Serving requires us to think of others above ourselves. God's blessing always comes with a mission. If we do not serve, if we only come to church and continually get filled, eventually our blessing becomes stale. It becomes ruined. God intends for us to be blessed and He intends for us to bless others, but when we don't, we become foul. We become consumed with ourselves. If we want to experience true transformation, it will require us to stop serving our own desires and serve others.

When you are not getting something out of church, it's a key indicator that it's time to serve on a ministry team. When you aren't feeling satisfied in life, it's a key indicator that you aren't reaching out to your sphere of influence. Life change happens through service.

Once we have done all the above, the praying, listening, eating, serving then we get to the good part; we get to **Share our Story.** **Romans 10:12** says, “<sup>14</sup> *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*” Wow, that's good stuff!

Not to worry, we aren't calling you to some crazy new lifestyle. We aren't telling you that you should move to another country and become a missionary. We aren't telling you that you need to become a professional preacher! The fact is, there are people right now in your work place that don't know Jesus. Don't be shocked. You already know by the way they dress and talk and act that they don't! Don't hide from them; do what Jesus did! Go to them. Sometimes we are in the church so long we forget that people who speak harshly and people who wouldn't do you a favor at work are lost. We need to remember they are *also* the ones that, “God so loved.” And because WE are so loved, we are blessed.

The book of James told us that if we believe, we serve. The scripture from Romans says others cannot come to faith unless we share! These two pieces of the puzzle go hand in hand. We serve people to build relationships to speak into their lives.

The great thing about sharing your story is it is YOUR story. You don't need a degree in theology to share it. No one can argue with how Christ has changed your life.

You simply share what your life was before you made Christ the Lord of your life, and how your life has changed since you said “yes” to Christ.

I want to give you some practical advice and brief tips about sharing. The key word here is be **brief!** No one wants to hear a 2-hour Hallmark Special about your life...or for some of you it's a two-hour Lifetime Drama. I'm just being a friend telling you this! The goal is to quickly get the focus back on their faith story!

I love hearing about people coming to Jesus, but nobody has time for a novel! So, if you go into a, “It all started back in 1972. It was a sunny day.” The point is to bring the conversation quickly back to those you are sharing with. I admit, it is harder for some of us to do; I know...I'm with you. It's generally all about me, so I need to keep a lid on it, too.

Share your story quickly! In our Following Jesus Class, we teach people to share their testimony in 3 minutes or less. Less is more. In our Disciple Making Movement Training we teach people to share their testimony in 15 seconds...and yes it can be done!

I share mine like this: I grew up in the church, but I never had any interest in God. I was following the steps of church-going because that was what we did in my family. I did make a decision to follow Jesus in my early teens, but I can remember looking at the people in my church thinking to myself, “this is too hard. These people are all good people. I can't be this good.” I didn't understand that Jesus wasn't expecting perfection. In fact, we need Jesus because of our imperfect nature. So, I wandered.

I found myself in my early 20's in a place of bad decisions. The bad decisions were piling up. My marriage was broken and I found myself in divorce. My finances were broken, I was abusing alcohol on the weekends, and just overall my life was not headed to a great place. I went to church only because I promised my aunt that I would. And it was during that time, showing up to some unknown church, generally hung over, that the people there were friendly to me anyway. God was calling me back and I listened to him. And the biggest thing about saying yes to Jesus was a sense of relief. That I could give Him my entire life...bad stuff and all. And my life became changed, as most of you now see. In my family, I would have been voted the “least likely to become a pastor.” But I want everyone to experience the life changing message of Jesus. Tell me about your faith story.

See what I did there? I shared and then got the focus back on the person by asking about their story. When you share your story, **follow up with a question.** Then, **be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.** He will guide you in answering their questions. And if they ask something that you don't know, say so! People ask me questions that I can't answer all the time, and I say, “I don't know!” Let me calm your fears. You can't mess this up. God will show up if we simply position ourselves where He is working. Sometimes people respond to Christ instantly, and sometimes it takes years.

As an aside caution, sometimes we don't share our story because we don't want to be "pushy" but we do share about the things we love! We share about the great shoes we bought, or that fabulous restaurant. It's quite alright to share about the great places to eat. We would never say, "I'm not going to tell anyone about this outstanding steak I had. I don't want to seem pushy."

So why are we timid about the thing that has changed the outcome of our eternity? My hunch is that we need to experience a deeper relationship with Christ now. A relationship with Christ is an adventure with twists and turns and leaps of faith. The deeper you go with Him, the more exciting the adventure. He will ask for more, but He will always provide what He's asking for. We simply need to be faithful and release the Blessing.

As we close today, you may be sitting here thinking, my journey with Christ hasn't been all that exciting lately. I can't think of the last time I served someone or the last time I shared my story. God is calling you back. He's calling you away from the mundane of religious and into the amazing place of relationship. He's asking for you to say, 'yes.' I'm coming back.

And someone here today has never said "yes" to Jesus. Maybe you are sitting here thinking, I could serve someone, but I don't have a story to share. Hear me, God is writing your story...and all you need to do is say "yes". You aren't too far from Him, you haven't made too many mistakes, your brokenness and bad decisions don't scare Him. Jesus lived perfectly, because we couldn't. He lived. He conquered sin and death after dying on the cross and rising again. Now, He's waiting for you to step into your faith story. And all it takes is a simple "yes."