

B.E.L.L.S. Series Week 1: Introduction and Bless

This week we are starting our series on the 5 Habits of Highly Missional People. We will be journeying together into a practical approach to being the hands, feet, and voice of Christ in the places where we live, work, and play. Each week we are going to be considering a different missional habit that forms the acronym B.E.L.L.S: bless, eat, listen, learn, sent. And each week we will be going home with a little bit of homework: to practice the missional habit of the day as well as all of the missional habits from the weeks before and to come back the next week ready to share. This morning we are going to look at how we can bless our neighbors in the name of Christ.

So before we dive into this weeks' missional habit, let's answer the question: What is a missional habit?

A) What is a missional habit?

i. Missional

Let's start with the word missional. What does that mean? The root word is obviously mission. Webster's dictionary defines mission as a specific task with which a person or a group is charged. God's primary mission for the church is to make disciples of the whole world. Jesus says in **Matthew 28:19-20** ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*" Mission, in the church, often gets divided into two separate and distinct categories: Evangelism and Service. Evangelism, meaning the verbal proclamation of the Gospel message along with the call for repentance and conversion, and service meaning an intentional effort to meet the physical needs of a group of people, usually done in the format of a 'service project.' The first is explicitly centered on the message of Christ, the second is motivated by the message of Christ but oftentimes that message is very soft if even there at all. Both are ways of carrying out God's mission in the world, but neither represent the complete Gospel of Jesus Christ

which offers peace both in eternity and now. Both can be a part of missional, but are not the whole of missional.

Missional is broader and more complete than evangelism because it's not only concerned with the conversion of a person, but it also wants to walk alongside of them as they grow in their Christian walk. Acclaimed Missiologist David Bosch writes "Mission is more than and different from recruitment to our brand of religion."

And it is broader and more complete than service because it is intentional about letting people know that the reason for service is because Jesus Christ has called us to it.

In his book "Surprise the World," Michael Frost writes "By missional, I mean all that we do and say that alerts others to the reign of God."

In order to alert our neighbors to the reign of God, we need to develop God-directed habits that come

from a heart rooted in Christ that points our neighbors back to Him.

Missional is the intersection of **who we are** and **what we do** as disciples of Jesus Christ. Let's think about those two categories for a moment: who we are and what we do.

Who we are: Our identity as God's children, our deepest held beliefs, our priorities, our vision for life, our dreams and desires

What we do: Our work, our hobbies, our habits, the way we interact with our family, friends, neighbors

When our identity as Children of God motivates our innermost passions and desires and bears fruit in the way we live externally, this intersection is missional.

ii. Habit

Let's next consider, what is a habit?

A habit is simply something that we do regularly. A

habit can be good, neutral, or bad. Maybe you have the habit of walking in the mornings, or reading to your children before bedtime, or wearing jeans on Fridays. These are all good or neutral habits. Maybe you chew your fingernails, or check your phone every few minutes, or drink too much caffeine. These are bad habits.

We form habits based on our values, priorities, and motivations, as well as the influences of the people we surround ourselves with. If you value family, then maybe you are in the habit of setting aside a night a week for family night. If you value physical fitness, then maybe you carve time out of your day for regular exercise. If you work with a group of people who like to talk about college football, then maybe you make sure to keep up on the latest OSU scores and stats.

Likewise, habits form us into who we are and who we are becoming.

This can be both good and bad. Aristotle said that “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is

not an act, but a habit.” If you have a habit of regular prayer, whether you want to or not, whether you always feel connected to God or not, you will be formed into a person greater in touch with God’s presence and voice. If you have the habit of always having the tv on, or radio on, or phone on because you don’t like silence, you will be formed into a person who struggles with their own self and thoughts.

What are the regular habits and rhythms of your life? Which of these habits are motivated by your faith? Which of these habits develop your faith?

iii. Missional Habit

So, missional is the alerting of others to the reign of God. It is the intersection of who we are and what we do. And habits are those things that we do that come from who we are and form who we are.

What then are missional habits? Missional habits are those things that we do that point us to Christ and the things we do to point others to Christ.

Think about the things that you do that would point yourself and others to Christ:

- What do you do with your time?
- How do you spend your money?
- How do you treat others?

B) Living Questionable Lives

Now, what is the connection between our missional habits and God's mission for the church, as found in Matthew 28? If God's mission for the church is to go into the world and make disciples, then how do we go about doing so? It has to first start with the hearing of the Gospel message.

Paul makes this point in **Romans 10:14**, that in order for people to be able to respond to the Good News, they have to first hear the Good News.

"¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?"

It's a simple equation; for people to receive the Gospel message and begin their journeys of discipleship, they need to first hear the message.

This is where evangelism comes into play. Typically when we think of evangelism, we think of bold proclamations, door to door campaigns, and big named preachers like Billy Graham. These are valid examples of evangelism. But they aren't the only way.

Paul tells us in **Ephesians 4:11** that the role of Evangelist is a specific gift given to some by the Holy Spirit, but it is only one out of five possible gifts.

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” All of us have one of these gifts as a primary expression of our faith and leadership style. But not all of us are called to be Evangelists. Not all of us are going to be a Paul or Peter or Billy Graham

Not all of us are called to be Evangelists, but we are all called to share the Gospel. So, how is sharing the Gospel different from being a big 'E' Evangelist? This is where missional habits come into play. Rather than creating large events to share the Gospel, Evangelism for non-evangelists means

developing those missional habits that point the world to the reign of God and being prepared to answer the world when it notices and asks you about those habits.

1 Peter 3:13-17

¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. ***Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;*** ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

Our missional habits can become signposts that point the world towards God, if we are prepared to give an account for the hope within us. But this

means that our missional habits should be making us stand out from the world around us.

There has to be something about the intersection of who we are and what we do that stands out as different from the way that the rest of the world lives, so much so, that it prompts people to take notice of us. Michael Frost refers to this as living a questionable life; living in such a way that your friends, neighbors, relatives, dentist, teacher, paper boy says “Hey, why did you do that?”

Michael Frost writes in his book “Surprise the World”:

“If our only habits as Christians are going to church and attending meetings, they’re not going to connect us with unbelievers nor invite their curiosity about our faith.””

If our only habits related to God are going to church Sunday mornings and occasionally attending church related meetings, then we don’t have missional habits. Because we aren’t doing anything questionable that would raise someone’s interest.

Even non-Christians expect Christians to go to church and attend meetings. And neither of those things necessarily means that our lives will be changed on the inside or out.

Over the next few weeks we are going to be working on developing missional habits that if practiced would cause us to lead ‘questionable lives.’ The first habit we are going to talk about is the habit of “Blessing Our Neighbors.”

C) Blessing Our Neighbors

One origin of the word ‘bless’ means ‘to add strength to another’s arm.’ I love the imagery of adding strength to another. In my mind I have two pictures of this. First, one person physically supporting another who is struggling to walk by putting their arm around them and walking beside them, and second, one person putting armor onto another’s arm.

In **Acts 3:25**, Peter is speaking to a crowd in Solomon’s Portico, and he says to them: ²⁵*You are the descendants of the prophets and of the*

covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, 'And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' You see, Peter had just healed a man who could not walk, and the crowd was amazed that he was able to do this. Peter told them that he did this through Jesus' power and reminded them that this too had been their calling, as Israelites, from God, to bless others. He was referring to the covenant that God made with Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3:**

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God had blessed the Israelites by making them into his people, but his vision for them was that through them he could bless the whole world. Peter's sermon was a reminder that this is still God's vision for His people and we as the church are an essential

part of that plan.

So how are we going to bless our neighbors? Your challenge, this coming week, is to bless three people, at least one who is not a part of this church.

What are some ways that you can do that? Frost talks about three types of blessings in *Surprise the World*: words of encouragement, acts of kindness, and gifts. Let's consider briefly these three kinds of blessing and while we do so, imagine or jot down some ideas you might have for blessing your neighbors this week.

iii. 3 Types of Blessings:

1) Words of Encouragement

"I can live for two months on a good compliment." –
Mark Twain

How can we offer words of encouragement? Well, certainly we can verbally encourage others.

Jennifer Reminder was sharing this week at Bible Study how when she work in the school system, they were encouraged to carry 6 pennies around

with them in their pocket as a reminder that when they would say something negative to a student, they needed to then follow it up with six positive things.

We could also write a note, send a card or email, or post an encouragement to someone's timeline. It doesn't need to be a big act, but it does need to be genuine.

2) Acts of Kindness

You interact with people every single day at home, school, work, the grocery store, the restaurant, and on the football field. Look for opportunities to act kindly and make another person's day a little better. But again, this is more than just holding open the door for somebody, although that's always a polite gesture. These are actions that come from a missional heart and would make somebody ask, "Now why did they do that?"

****Example***

3) Gifts

These can be big or small, planned or spontaneous. The point again is that they need to be given with a sincere heart and spirit. I'll give an example from my week. I was browsing Facebook and noticed that it was my friend's birthday; she also happens to be a local business owner who frequents Sweetie Pie's Coffee. It was still early in the day, so I texted Becca and Ashley that I would pay for whatever she ordered when she came in. It was spontaneous, it really wasn't a big deal, but I was able to buy her a bagel, wish her a happy birthday, and show her a little kindness. I tell you this not to puff myself up but to say that there are ways to bless others in front of us every day if we just keep our eyes opened.

Words of encouragement, acts of kindness, and gifts; these are just three kinds of blessings that can be done in many, many different ways. We need to remember that when we practice these habits, they are for the purpose of alerting others to the reign of God, not to our own goodness. And if we are just blessing someone to be nice without any connection to a life lived differently because of

Jesus, then we are just being nice. Which isn't bad, but it isn't missional.

We also cannot bless with expectations of conversion. Strings cannot be attached. We aren't in the job of manipulating people into following Jesus. We are called to bless because God has called us to be a witness of his blessings. This can be a hard distinction to make, but it is an important one. People are smart and they know when you are being fake. And if you've ever had somebody be nice to you with strings attached, you know how bad it feels when you realize that person is being disingenuous.

So, your homework for this week is to bless three people, one not from this church, and to come back prepared to share what happened, either in the service or in Sunday School. And this sharing piece is important; we want to hear your stories from the BELLS challenge, as way of encouragement and to get ideas. I know that you can do it, and I look forward to hearing all about it.

I want to close with a really interesting story that tells the missional power of blessing. In a doctoral thesis titled 'Blessers vs. Converters,' the researchers studied two teams of short term missionaries in Thailand. One team went with the explicit purpose of converting the Thai people to Christianity. The other team went simply to blessing whoever they came across in the most practical ways possible. The research found two interesting things. First, the team that went with the object to bless had a greater social impact than the team that went to evangelize and convert. Second, the team that went to bless had 50 times more converts than the team that went with the purpose to convert. Is this what you would have expected to happen? What can we learn from their findings? The missional habit of blessing is an act of evangelism, and it can be even more effective than the traditional ways that the church shares the gospel. As we go from here to bless the people we meet where we live, work, or play, let's be ready and prepared to answer our neighbors for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.