



SMALL GROUP GUIDE



"We love because He first loved us."
- 1 John 4:19



How to Use This Study Guide

We're about to embark on a six-week journey that will help us develop a lifestyle that can bless others. We strongly believe that God has the power to radically transform lives and the way He has chosen to do that is through His people—us!

We'll be using the acronym **BLESS** to create practices in our lives to reach out to our neighbors and other people God has placed near us. **BLESS** stands for:

Be in prayer

Listen with compassion

Eat together

Serve in love

Share a story



Whether the group you're meeting with has been together for several years or is just starting out, the discussion provided within these pages can help you begin to discover how we can all be part of the kingdom work that God has called us to. As you commit to spending time together on this journey of learning and discovery here are some other helpful pieces to consider:

SERMONS

Sermons can be found at [**constancefree.org/videos**](https://constancefree.org/videos)

WEEKLY REMINDERS

To help keep the **BLESS** practices a part of our lives, we've created weekly ideas that we'll share on the Constance App. You can download it for free on the App Store.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit [**constancefree.org/bless**](https://constancefree.org/bless) for additional resources including practical tips, articles, podcasts and books to help you dive even deeper into the **BLESS** practices.



We Are Blessed To Be a Blessing

// Week 1

Since the very beginning of our story with God, He has demonstrated His deep love for us through His blessing. In turn, we have the incredible opportunity to become a blessing to others. In the following weeks, we'll focus on the five BLESS practices and how they help us connect people with Jesus.

This week we'll look at ways God blessed His people throughout Scripture. In Genesis we see the mission God gave Abram and the blessings Abram received by living a life of faith. God also gave us a mission through the words of Jesus—to go and make disciples of all nations. With this command we receive a wonderful assurance from Jesus, “and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20).

PRAYER

As you begin your time together, spend time praying for your group. Pray that the Holy Spirit would begin to reveal to you ways in which you can be challenged to live a life on mission, helping people connect with Jesus.

*I am counting
every blessing
Counting every
blessing
Letting go and trusting
When I cannot see*

*I am counting
every blessing
Counting every
blessing
Surely every season
You are good to me*

-Rend Collective
Counting Every Blessing

SHARE

Spend some time getting to know your fellow group members, especially if this is one of your first times meeting together. What brought you to this group? In what ways do you hope to be challenged through this study?

SCRIPTURE

Read Genesis 12:1-5 and Matthew 28:18-20

1. What blessing did God give Abram in Genesis 12:2-3?
2. What did God command Abram to do before He gave him a blessing? Why do you think this is significant?
3. What do you think are some things that would have made it difficult for Abram to leave? What compelled him to go?
4. Do you think blessings are conditional? Can we receive a blessing without any action on our part?

5. Let's compare the verses in Genesis 12 and Matthew 28. What do these passages have in common and what are their differences?
6. What are some reasons that make it difficult for us leave where we are, or what we're doing, to go where God calls us? What compels us then to go serve Him?
7. When we look at the passage in Matthew, what blessing does Jesus give us? What command comes before it?

GOING DEEPER

1. What do you think are some of the greatest barriers that prevent people from seeing the ways they are blessed?
2. What are some of the common ways that our culture defines "being blessed?" Do these ever contradict what Scripture says?
3. Do you think it is important to be aware of how God has blessed us as we set out to bless others? Why?

MOVING OUT

1. This week take an inventory of the ways you have been blessed. Before beginning, read Matthew 5 and reflect on who Jesus calls blessed—it isn't who we would normally consider blessed. Keep this "upside-down" way of looking at blessings in mind as you think of the blessings in your own life.
 2. Find a way to intentionally bless someone this week. Pray that God would provide opportunities, and be especially aware of ways you might bless someone who you may not normally notice in your day-to-day interactions. Here are some ideas to get you started. Add more as they come to mind.
- Find out your colleague's favorite coffee drink and buy it for them.
 - Offer to watch a neighbor's kids while they run errands or go on a date.
 - Write a note of appreciation to a friend or someone who serves your family in some way.
 - Pay for the meal of the person behind you in the drive-through lane.
 - Let someone know that you are praying for them or pray with them.
 - Ask someone what their greatest encouragement and discouragement has been recently.
 - _____
 - _____

*"It works like this.
In surprising ways,
suffering makes
room in our spirit
for us to know and
experience the
blessings of God's
peace and presence.
Without suffering,
we simply can't
know his comfort.
In mourning, we
experience the
blessing of God's
presence."*

-Kyle Idleman
The End of Me



BE IN PRAYER

// Week 2

When we hear the word “cultivate” a certain agricultural picture may come to mind. You might think of soil being prepared, turned over and broken loose so that it is ready to receive a seed and foster the growth of new crops. Hearts can be cultivated in the same way, and prayer is the means by which this happens.

As we pray, our own hearts are cultivated and God prepares us to see opportunities to join Him in helping people connect with Jesus. As he brings about this awareness in us, He will also begin to equip us to do this work. We begin to see our opportunities and abilities grow as we pray that God would use us.

As we pray, the hearts of others are also cultivated. We are brought into the much larger work that the Holy Spirit is doing in people’s hearts and lives. We can witness hearts softened and minds opened to receive the good news of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Spend some time as a group praying God would begin to help you identify a few people you could bless. Pray that He will show you opportunities and give you the ability to bless these people. Pray that their hearts would be open to transformation through Jesus.

SHARE

How did taking an inventory of your blessings go last week? Did you find it challenging or relatively easy?

Did you have an opportunity to bless a neighbor or someone else in the past week? Share your experience.

SCRIPTURE

Read Colossians 4:2-4

1. These verses were part of a letter Paul wrote to the church in Colossae while imprisoned.
If you were in prison, what do you think you'd be asking for in prayer? As a person facing extreme hardships, are you surprised by how Paul is encouraging his readers to pray?
2. What are some characteristics of a person who is devoted to something? What does it look like to be devoted to prayer?
3. What do you think Paul meant in asking that he be able to proclaim his message clearly?
How might his message be unclear?

To say that "prayer changes things" is not as close to the truth as saying, "Prayer changes me and then I change things." God has established things so that prayer, on the basis of redemption, changes the way a person looks at things. Prayer is not a matter of changing things externally, but one of working miracles in a person's inner nature.

—Charles Spurgeon

4. Why do you think Paul prayed for “open doors” as opposed to creating his own doors for the message to be received? What is the difference between the two?
5. What do you think our role is in seeking out open doors? Can we passively wait for them to be revealed to us or do we need to take action in order to find open doors for our message?

GOING DEEPER

1. Why do you think being in prayer is the first of the BLESS practices?
2. Why do you think it is so difficult for us to devote ourselves to prayer? Are there any misconceptions we have about prayer that contribute to lack of devotion?
3. What are some of the barriers that might come up as you begin praying regularly for people near us? How can we, as a group, support each other as we begin “being in prayer” for these individuals?

MOVING OUT

Take some time to think about Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, Neighbors, and Colleagues (also known as “FRANC”) who do not know God.

Ask God to bring to mind 3 to 5 people to pray for daily. Write their names below:

Here are some ways you can pray for these individuals:
(Insert the person’s name that you’re praying for in the blank)

Pray for _____ to become thirsty for God.
(John 7:37-39)

Pray for _____ to become open to change.
(2 Corinthians 7:10)

Pray for _____ to clearly experience God’s love. (1 John 4:7-10, 19-21)

Pray for _____ to develop deep spiritual rootedness in Christ. (John 15:5; Colossians 2:6-7)

Just as we are praying for others, here are some ways we can be in prayer for ourselves.

Pray that you would trust in the Lord and not try to bless others through your own strength. (Proverbs 3:5)

Pray that God would open a door for the message to be heard. (Colossians 2:3)

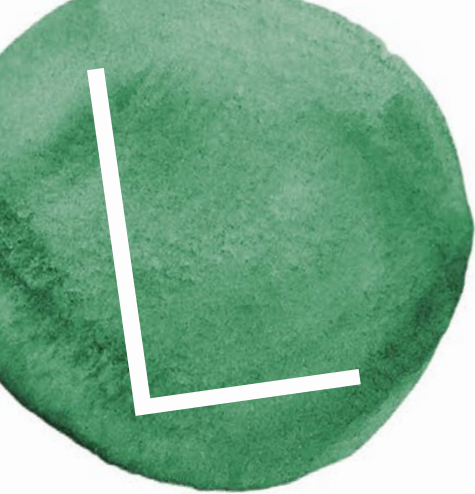
Pray that God would provide opportunities to speak boldly. (Acts 28:31)

“We cannot think of the Holy Spirit in impersonal terms. His ‘presence’ is not some mystical gas or the arrival of some nondescript energy force. His presence is very personal. He lives in us personally. He works in us personally. He moves in and among us personally.”

-Daniel Henderson

We should be talking to God about our neighbors before we are talking to our neighbors about God.





LISTEN WITH COMPASSION

// Week 3

Listening with compassion means we don't just hear the words someone is saying to us. We are active listeners who begin to understand the needs this person has, the past that has shaped their present, and how we might be able to bring the hope of Jesus into their life. Listening with compassion requires more than just a listening ear—although that is very important. It also requires a heart that is open to using these conversations to be a blessing to others.

Listening often goes against what we're inclined to do when we're in conversation with another person. Being a good listener requires practice and intentionality and doesn't typically come naturally, but it is worth practicing! The better we become at listening, the more comfortable people will be around us, and the more likely they'll be to open up and share their story with us.

As followers of Christ, listening to the Holy Spirit is also vital when we are helping people connect with Jesus. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us, and He is the one who is at work in the people's lives on our prayer list. When we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, He reveals opportunities to listen to others and serve them in love.

SHARE

If you haven't done so already, share with the group who is on your prayer list. What intentional actions have helped you to "be in prayer" for these people?

PRAYER

Whether your group chooses to begin your time in prayer or close in prayer, spend time praying over the conversations that are taking place with those you are seeking to bless. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you opportunities to listen as well as speak into people's lives.

GOING DEEPER

This week, we're going to begin by discussing ways we're called to be good listeners. To become better listeners, we need to be doing three things while we are listening.

[1] We need to be *listening to God*.

How can we position ourselves to be better listeners to God?

Can you think of a time when God directed you to speak to someone you normally wouldn't have? Did you follow through? If not, what kept you from doing so? If you did follow through, how did the experience go?

*"Open up our eyes
To see the wounds
that bind all of
humankind.
May our
shutter hearts
greet the dawn
of life with charity
and love."*

**-The Brilliance
Brother**

[2] We need to be *listening to others*.

Can you think of a time when you didn't feel like you were being heard? What did that feel like? How do you tend to respond when you don't feel heard?

Who is the best listener you know? What makes them a good listener? How does that person make you feel?

What are the attitudes that keep us from being good listeners? Which of the following reasons contribute the most to us being poor listeners?

- Too busy to give undivided attention.
- More concerned about what we have to say than what others have to say.
- Not really caring about the other person, but only how their "stuff" intersects with ours.
- Distracted by our phone.
- Thinking we can multi-task while listening.

"Most people are deeply attracted to someone who will listen to them. Being available means being willing to focus my attention on the person or people God has placed right in front of me."

-Paul Borthwick,
Everyday Witness

[3] We need to *listen for an opportunity*.

Often, when we are engaging with people, we find ourselves doing so with an agenda. Are there types of agendas that are good? Are there agendas that might get in the way of helping people connect with Jesus?

SCRIPTURE

Read Mark 9:14-27

1. Jesus seemed to have a way of asking questions to help people tell their story and reveal their heart. In Mark 9:21, Jesus asked a father whose son suffered with seizures, “How long has he been like this?” Do you think that Jesus knew the answer to this question? Why did Jesus ask it?
2. What are some questions that we could use to draw out stories from someone, especially as it relates to their spiritual journey?
3. Which of these—listening to God, listening to others, or listening for an opportunity—do you think is the most challenging? Why?

MOVING OUT

Spend some time thinking through your week. Are there any places in your schedule that can be made available to “listen with compassion?” Here are some ideas and space to add more of your own:

- Take a walk around your neighborhood with the intention of striking up a conversation if the opportunity presents itself.
- If you find yourself waiting for an appointment, standing in line at the store, or on the sidelines of a sporting event resist the urge to pull out your phone. Instead, seek opportunities to engage with the people around you.
- If you are feeling inconvenienced by a neighbor, family member, friend, or stranger, ask God to show you how to take time to “listen with compassion.”

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"Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God."

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*





EAT TOGETHER

// Week 4

Imagine a table. It might be set with a tablecloth, patterned dishes and silverware. Or perhaps there are simply paper plates, plastic cups, and forks. Now imagine the chairs set up around this table, the people sitting in them, the laughter and conversations being passed back and forth just like the dishes of food passing between hands. Or perhaps there isn't laughter but the tough things of life being discussed - brokenness making its way out into the open.

When we sit around a table and share a meal with others we have the opportunity to move a relationship from acquaintance toward friendship. The table can be a great equalizer. Everyone has a place and an opportunity to be heard and known while sharing in the intimacy of a meal. Eating together provides an opportunity to develop relational bridges, discover people's stories, and discern the next steps in helping them connect with Jesus.

SHARE

How well did you "listen with compassion" this week? Was there a specific moment when you were able to set aside distractions and listen to someone else's story? Share the details of this encounter with the group.

PRAYER

Whether your group chooses to begin your time in prayer or close in prayer, spend time praying over the meals that will be shared with people who need to hear the good news of Jesus. Pray that compassionate conversation would occur and that people would feel heard, known, loved, and accepted.

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 5:27-32

1. Tax collectors were despised in the Jewish community, and for good reason! They often collected more money than was required from Rome and became very wealthy because of it. What did Jesus see in these individuals that others did not? Why did he choose to associate with them?
2. Why do you think Levi felt the need to throw a party with Jesus invited as the guest? Wouldn't you think he would have set up a lecture hall for his friends to listen to Jesus? What is so important about this relational component leading the way?





"I'm convinced that our dinner tables have the potential to be the most "missional" places in all of our lives. Perhaps before we invite people to Jesus or invite them to church, we should invite them to dinner."

-Barry D. Jones



3. How did Jesus' posture toward tax collectors like Levi ultimately result in them leaving behind their sinful ways and following him? What can we learn from his example?

4. What do you think Levi and his friends thought of the Pharisees? What do you think are some of the perceptions people today have of "religious folks?" How could eating together begin to change these perceptions?

5. Jesus faced criticism for eating with tax collectors and other "undesirable" individuals. What can we learn from his response in verses 31-32? How can this response compel us to reach out to and spend time with those that are far away from Jesus?

6. Jesus was obviously able to associate with sinners without sinning. What needs to be in place in our own lives so that we can do the same?



GOING DEEPER

1. Why is the practice of hospitality and eating together so powerful?
2. How can the BLESS practices we have discussed so far be brought into “eating together?” How could they deepen the time spent together over a meal?
3. What do you see as some of the challenges to the practice of “eating together?” Are there any hesitations you’re feeling about this practice?

MOVING OUT

1. Pray that God would provide opportunities to share a meal with the people on your prayer list. Pray that He would equip you to develop relational bridges through the practice of eating together.

2. Eat with someone this week! Here are some ways to do it:

- Invite a neighbor or friend over for dinner.
- Ask a colleague out for lunch.
- Ask a friend you are praying for to go out for coffee.
- Buy ingredients for ice cream sundaes and invite neighbors over for an ice cream party.
- As the holidays draw near think of someone you could invite to your family celebrations.
- Organize a block party or neighborhood gathering.
- Other ideas:

3. As you share time with others over a meal or a drink, be mindful of how you can listen with compassion and develop relational bridges, discover their story, and discern next steps.



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SERVE IN LOVE

// Week 5

The story of a paralyzed man told in Luke 5 is one you may know. Jesus was teaching in a home, and people were crowding in to hear his words. There was no room to move, no way to squeeze in any closer. A paralyzed man, having heard of the miracles that Jesus had performed, wished to see Him. He had a glimpse of hope that he might be released from his disability, but it was still unreachable because of the crowd.

Then we see an act of service by some of his friends. They create a way for the paralyzed man to meet Jesus. These friends carry the man up to the roof, they dig through the roof and create an opening, and then they lower him down so that he is right in front of Jesus. These friends created a way for the paralyzed man to not only meet Jesus but experience His love, forgiveness and healing first-hand.

When we serve in love, we have the opportunity to do the same thing. Sometimes our service looks very practical—shoveling someone's driveway, bringing a meal during sickness, or helping to complete a home improvement project. Other times our service looks more like being present during moments of crisis or being willing to answer the hard questions someone has about faith.

However we serve, when we do it in love we are providing a way for the “roof to be opened” so that someone has the opportunity to meet Jesus. We are helping remove barriers and obstacles so that they can experience His love, forgiveness and healing first-hand.

SHARE

Did you have the opportunity to eat with someone you have been praying for this week? How did it go? In what ways was your relationship deepened?

PRAYER

As a group, spend time praying that the Holy Spirit would reveal ways that you can serve people in love. Also, pray you would seek out these opportunities and be willing to serve even when it might put you outside of our comfort zones.

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 5:17-26

1. What role did the men carrying the mat have in bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus? How did they remove the obstacles that were in his way?

*Let my life be the proof,
The proof of Your love
Let my love
look like You and
what You're made of.
How You lived,
how You died,
Love is sacrifice.
So let my life
be the proof,
The proof of Your love.*

-For King and Country
The Proof of Your Love

2. Serving others sometimes comes at great cost. For example, the men in the story had to cut a hole in a roof that would most likely need to be repaired. What are some of the costs we may pay when we serve others in love?
3. How did Jesus serve the paralyzed man in love?
4. What is our role and what is God's role in serving others? How do they differ?
5. There are several examples in Scripture of people helping others meet Jesus by serving in love. Choose one or two of these passages to read as a group. As you read these verses, why is it so important that we serve others in love?
 - Jesus Heals Many (Mark 1:32-34)
 - A Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)
 - Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man (Matthew 9:1-2)
 - Jesus Raises a Dead Girl (Matthew 9:18-19)
 - A Demon-Possessed Man (Matthew 9:32-33)
 - The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)



GOING DEEPER

1. Think about a time when someone served you. How did this experience impact you? In what ways did the act of service deepen the relationship you had/have with this person?
2. In our current culture, what perceptions do people have about Christians? How can our serving in love impact the perceptions people have of Christians? How can it impact the perceptions of the people on our prayer list?
3. Before coming to Christ we are all, in a sense, “on the mat”—paralyzed and unable to reach God. When you think about the people on your prayer list, what are some ways that they are spiritually and maybe even physically on the mat?
4. What are some of the hesitations or barriers we may have when it comes to serving others in love? In what ways can we overcome these barriers?

MOVING OUT

There are so many ways that we can serve others in love. Take some time to think of ways that you can serve the people on your prayer list and record your ideas below. For a few ideas to get you started go to ***constancefree.org/bless***.

As you focus on serving in love this week choose one or two ways to serve the people on your prayer list.

Draw on the things you may have learned as you have listened and eaten together. In these conversations, people will often reveal to you how best to serve them.

FOR NEXT WEEK: Go to ***www.iamsecond.com***. Take time to watch a few videos of people's stories and be ready to discuss one or two that stuck out to you.



"The only way you can serve God is by serving other people."

-Rick Warren





SHARE A STORY

// Week 6

Stories hold a lot of power. They have the power to change opinions, create empathy, provide clarity, and bring transformation. Our personal stories are unique and essential tools in helping others understand how Jesus impacts lives in real and tangible ways. Through stories, people can begin to believe that change is possible and hope is personal. They can start to understand what love looks like and that true, lasting, selfless love can be theirs to experience through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The final practice of BLESS is to share a story. Sometimes a personal story of how God worked in our lives is the best one to share. Other times, someone else's story will connect most strongly with the person we're trying to reach. Either way, we are presenting our listeners with a gift when we share a story.

Sharing stories can sometimes take us outside of our comfort zone as we open up about how Jesus has worked in our lives. As we think about stories to share, we can be comforted by the fact that the Holy Spirit is at work as we share. He is the one that will ultimately soften hearts so our message can be heard. We can trust Him to work through us as we come alongside the work that He is already doing in the hearer's heart.

SHARE

Did you have an opportunity to serve someone from your prayer list in love? What did you do? How did it go?

As we begin talking about the importance of story, think back to some of the iamsecond stories you watched this week. Which one did you find most impactful?

PRAYER

As a group, spend some time praying that God would show you opportunities to love others by sharing a story of His work. Pray for boldness as you take this step of faith.

SCRIPTURE

Read Acts 22:3-16

1. What was Paul's life like before his encounter with God? In what ways was he far away from God? Do you think he recognized this distance from God before his encounter on the road? Why do you think it was hard for Paul to see how far he was from God?

*Everybody's got
a blank page
A story they're
writing today
A wall that
they're climbing
You can carry the past
on your shoulders
Or you can start over
Regrets, no matter
what you've
gone through
Jesus, He gave it all
to save you
He carried the cross
on His shoulders
So you can start over*

-Flame, Start Over



2. How did God use Ananias in Paul's story? (See Acts 9:10-19) What reasons did Ananias have to avoid being involved in Paul's story? Were his fears reasonable?
3. How did Paul use his personal story to help others meet Jesus?

GOING DEEPER

1. Why do you think stories are so powerful? In what ways do stories help build relationships?
2. What unique experiences, perhaps hard and difficult, has God given you that help you identify and connect with other people?

Because God gave you your makeup and superintended every moment of your past, including all the hardship, pain, and struggles, He wants to use your words in a unique manner. No one else can speak through your vocal cords, and, equally important, no one else has your story.

-Chuck Swindoll

3. There is a way to tell a life story where we are the heroes, and another way to tell the story with God as the hero. Which is more common? Which is more truthful?

4. What might keep us from sharing our story? Fear of rejection? The feeling that our story isn't "powerful enough?" Other?

MOVING OUT

When you think about the people on your prayer list, what story from your own life, or the lives of others, could you share that would help them understand the transforming power of Jesus?

Take time to think about and write down some stories from your life. Think about how God has worked in the situations where you have experienced pain, hopelessness, or fear. What did your life look like before, during, and after these specific times? How did Jesus meet you during these times?

Pray that God would give you an opportunity to share a story with the people on your prayer list that would help them understand the transforming power of Jesus. Pray that He would encourage you to seek out and take advantage of these opportunities even when it means stepping outside of your comfort zone.



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