

# Project B.L.E.S.S.

Doing the world some good

Conversations for communities of faith

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### Foundational Text

Genesis 12:1-3: The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"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.

I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

### Conversation Series Description

By virtue of being created in God's image, all humanity is wired for blessing. God blesses humanity so that humanity will pass on the blessing. Followers of Jesus, descendants in the line of Abram, are particularly called to be a channel of blessing for the whole world. This series of conversations imagines what it might look like for people to posture their lives in such a way as to bless others. Each conversation is based on one letter of the acronym B.L.E.S.S.: 1) bless; 2) listen; 3) eat; 4) study; and 5) sent.<sup>1</sup>

### Weekly Components

Each week includes several components that make up the flow of a particular gathering's conversation. These components don't necessarily have to flow in the same order for every gathering, but should be incorporated in some way.

- Communion Experience
- Dwelling in the Word
- Empty Chair Prayer
- Scripture Conversation
- Pastoral Prayer
- Music

Each weekly sketch offers suggestions for how to make use of each component.

### Guidance for Facilitation

In every Scripture Conversation section there are bullets in brackets that begin with the word Focus. For instance: [Focus: God is the master blessing. God blesses all humanity by creating it in his image. God blesses humanity so that it will pass on the blessing in reproduction and in care of the earth.]

These focus points are not meant to serve as teaching points, where the facilitator asks a question and then proceeds to answer it. Rather, they serve as a reference point for the facilitator in determining whether the conversation is on target. They may also serve as points of interjection if participants struggle to see the focus of the text or if the conversation needs a catalyst. Periods of silence can be fruitful, too.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the "BELLS" concept developed by Michael Frost in *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Hendrickson, 2006), 150-151. Chris Altmock was the inspiration for the BLESS acronym.

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### Week One: Blessing Others

#### Communion Experience

- Thought: God blesses us in Jesus by thinking of our needs before his own (cf. Phil. 2:1-11)
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate

#### Dwelling in the Word

- Text: Genesis 12:1-3
- Encourage people to relax, close their eyes and listen for God. Prepare them to listen for a phrase or a word that sticks out to them in the text.
- Read it one time; read a second time, asking participants to repeat phrases after you; read it a third time; give two minutes of silence.
- After silence, ask: What did you hear?

#### Empty Chair Prayer

- Explain: every week we pray for God to fill the empty chair with someone who is searching for God.
- If appropriate, make sure to tell any new people present that their presence is an answer to prayer.
- Ask: What people in your life are in need of a blessing?
- Pray for those mentioned.

#### Scripture Conversation

- Icebreaker: Mention one person you know who is really good at blessing other people.
- This series of conversations is about blessing other people—in other words, doing good for others.
- Each week we'll talk about rhythms of life we can develop that God can use to do good for others.
- This week we're talking about the general idea of blessing.
- Read Genesis 1:26-28 (page 1).
- Question: What is the role of blessing in this text?
- [Focus: God is the master blessing. God blesses all humanity by creating it in his image. God blesses humanity so that it will pass on the blessing in reproduction and in care of the earth.]
- Jesus embodies the fullness of God. Since God is the master blessing, and Jesus is God's perfect reflection, we can learn about blessing others by considering Jesus' life.
- Read Philippians 2:1-11 (page 804).
- Question: How does Jesus model a life that blesses others?
- [Focus: Jesus is full of love. He is humble. He values others above himself. He looked to the interests of others.]
- Question: What kinds of things would we do if we were people who blessed others?

#### Pastoral Prayer

- Consider breaking out into smaller groups of 3-4.
- Appoint a facilitator for each group and equip them to ask their group a question.
- Ask, What one person can you bless this week and how can you bless them?
- Pray that both those who bless and those who receive blessing will experience God

#### Music

- Choose 1-2 songs that focus on how God blesses humanity, or how people bless others.
- Song suggestions: He is Here, When I Think about the Lord, Breathing the Breath
- Musical options: play the songs on a CD or instruments to listen to or sing along with.
- Remember to have the lyrics available for people either printed or with PowerPoint.

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### Week Two: Listening to God

#### Communion Experience

- Thought: Jesus' life models for us what it means to listen to God and be obedient in mission. Jesus' listening led him to the cross and tomb on our behalf (cf. Luke 22:39-44)
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate

#### Dwelling in the Word

- Text: Genesis 12:1-3
- Encourage people to relax, close their eyes and listen for God. Prepare them to listen for a phrase or a word that sticks out to them in the text.
- Read it one time; read a second time, asking participants to repeat phrases after you; read it a third time; give two minutes of silence.
- After silence, ask: What did you hear?

#### Empty Chair Prayer

- Explain: every week we pray for God to fill the empty chair with someone who is searching for God.
- If appropriate, make sure to tell any new people present that their presence is an answer to prayer.
- Ask participants to consider who in their lives God might be drawing into our community.
- Pray for the empty chair by opening a time of silence to listen to God and to lift up our disconnected friends.

#### Scripture Conversation

- Icebreaker: God still speaks to his people when they listen. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- This series of conversations is about blessing other people—in other words, doing good for others.
- Each week we're talking about rhythms of life we can develop that God can use to do good for others.
- This week we're talking about listening to God.
- Read Acts 12:25 – 13:3. (page 755).
- Question: How did the early church listen to God?
- [Focus: They heard from God as they worshipped and fasted – in other words, as they were laying down their own agendas for God's.]
- Question: What's the connection in this text between listening to God and blessing other people?
- [Focus: As the early church leaders were worshipping and fasting, they heard from God. God inspired them to send out Barnabas and Saul for the sake of blessing other people.]
- Question: What are specific ways we can listen to God?
- [Focus: In the midst of this conversation, mention the dwelling prayer as a way of listening to God.]

#### Pastoral Prayer

- Consider breaking out into smaller groups of 3-4.
- Appoint a facilitator for each group and equip them to ask their group a question.
- Ask, What rhythms do you have for listening to God and how might you grow in those rhythms?
- Pray for God to speak to each person as they make time to listen.

#### Music

- Choose 1-2 songs that focus on listening to God and how God speaks.
- Song Suggestions: Word of God Speak, Speak O Lord
- Musical options: play the songs on a CD or instruments to listen to or sing along with.
- Remember to have the lyrics available for people either printed or with PowerPoint.

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### Week Three: Eating with Strangers

#### Communion Experience

- Thought: God welcomes us, once strangers to God because of our sin, to his banquet table through the death and resurrection of Jesus (cf. Ephesians 2:19-22)
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate

#### Dwelling in the Word

- Text: Genesis 12:1-3
- Encourage people to relax, close their eyes and listen for God. Prepare them to listen for a phrase or a word that sticks out to them in the text.
- Read it one time; read a second time, asking participants to repeat phrases after you; read it a third time; give two minutes of silence.
- After silence, ask: What did you hear?

#### Empty Chair Prayer

- Explain: every week we pray for God to fill the empty chair with someone who is searching for God.
- If appropriate, make sure to tell any new people present that their presence is an answer to prayer.
- Ask participants to consider who God might want us to invite to our table.
- Pray for the empty chair by allowing participants to mention the names of people in midst of a larger prayer.

#### Scripture Conversation

- Icebreaker: Share a good memory of a time someone you didn't know invited you to their table.
- This series of conversations is about blessing other people—in other words, doing good for others.
- Each week we're talking about rhythms of life we can develop that God can use to do good for others.
- This week we're talking about the practice of hospitality—welcoming strangers to our table.
- Read Hebrews 13:2 (page 829).
- The word hospitality literally means "love of strangers."
- Question: What rationale is given in this text for showing hospitality?
- [Focus: There's a chance that one might be hosting an angel, one of God's messengers. In way, this text is telling us to treat every stranger we meet like we would treat God if we met him.]
- This text probably refers to a great story in Genesis 18:1-15. Read it (page 11).
- This text takes Hebrews 13 a step further to say that there's a chance we might encounter God by showing hospitality to strangers.
- Question: What does it say about God to put such a high value on the practice of hospitality?
- [Focus: God cares for the stranger, the other, the outsider. All of them were created by God and belong to God. God is others-focused and does good things for them.]
- Question: What would it look like for us to be a community of hospitality?

#### Pastoral Prayer

- Consider breaking out into smaller groups of 3-4.
- Appoint a facilitator for each group and equip them to ask their group a question.
- Ask, Who is one person you don't know very well that you can make plans to show hospitality to?  
How can you develop hospitality as a rhythm in your life?
- Pray for God to work through each participant's hospitality and for them to encounter God in it.

#### Music

- Choose 1-2 songs that focus on how God welcomes us or how we welcome others.
- Song Suggestions: All Who Are Thirsty, Worthy is the Lamb, Gifted Response
- Musical options: play the songs on a CD or instruments to listen to or sing along with.
- Remember to have the lyrics available for people either printed or with PowerPoint.

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### Week Four: Studying the Heart of God

#### Communion Experience

- Thought: Jesus, in the incarnation and crucifixion, makes the heart of God known to us (cf. Jn. 1:18)
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate

#### Dwelling in the Word

- Text: Genesis 12:1-3
- Encourage people to relax, close their eyes and listen for God. Prepare them to listen for a phrase or a word that sticks out to them in the text.
- Read it one time; read a second time, asking participants to repeat phrases after you; read it a third time; give two minutes of silence.
- After silence, ask: What did you hear?

#### Empty Chair Prayer

- Explain: every week we pray for God to fill the empty chair with someone who is searching for God.
- If appropriate, make sure to tell any new people present that their presence is an answer to prayer.
- Ask participants to share the names of people on their hearts who are disconnected from God.
- Pray over the names shared, mentioning a few that stood out in particular.

#### Scripture Conversation

- Icebreaker: What's one powerful resource (book/DVD/podcast) that's taught you about God recently?
- This series of conversations is about blessing other people—in other words, doing good for others.
- Each week we're talking about rhythms of life we can develop that God can use to do good for others.
- This week we're talking about studying the heart of God.
- Read Psalm 119:9-16 (page 420).
- Question: What is the psalmist's technique for studying the heart of God?
- [Focus: He lives according to God's word. He hides God's word in his heart. He rejoices, meditates and delights in God's law.]
- Question: There's a difference in studying merely for information vs. studying for transformation. How does the psalmist embody studying for transformation?
- [Focus: The psalmist's motivation for studying God's law is not to know more, but to live rightly. His concern is that he might not sin against God. Studying the law of God transforms him.]
- Question: How does studying the heart of God enable us to bless other people?
- [Focus: When we are attuned to the nature of the master blessing, we're more likely to be aware of ways we can bless others. God's heart teaches us how to bless others.]
- Question: What are different ways to study the heart of God?
- [Focus: Potential ideas include listening to music, podcasting, reading books about Jesus, reading the gospels, etc.]

#### Pastoral Prayer

- Consider breaking out into smaller groups of 3-4.
- Appoint a facilitator for each group and equip them to ask their group a question.
- Ask, How do you best learn about God's heart? How might you grow in your rhythms for study?
- Pray for God to form his heart more fully in the hearts of each participant through their study.

#### Music

- Choose 1-2 songs that focus on the heart/nature/character of God.
- Song Suggestions: Uncreated One, Everlasting God, You Are God Alone, How Great is Our God
- Musical options: play the songs on a CD or instruments to listen to or sing along with.
- Remember to have the lyrics available for people either printed or with PowerPoint.

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### Week Five: Sent Out Into the World

#### Communion Experience

- Thought: Just as Jesus was sent by God into the world, so Jesus sends us (cf. Jn. 17:18)
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate

#### Dwelling in the Word

- Text: Genesis 12:1-3
- Encourage people to relax, close their eyes and listen for God. Prepare them to listen for a phrase or a word that sticks out to them in the text.
- Read it one time; read a second time, asking participants to repeat phrases after you; read it a third time; give two minutes of silence.
- After silence, ask: What did you hear?

#### Empty Chair Prayer

- Explain: every week we pray for God to fill the empty chair with someone who is searching for God.
- If appropriate, make sure to tell any new people present that their presence is an answer to prayer.
- Ask participants to share the names of people they sense God is sending them to in order to bless
- Pray for God to send the participants to those they've mentioned

#### Scripture Conversation

- Icebreaker: What's your favorite "non-church" space to hang out in and why?
- This series of conversations is about blessing other people—in other words, doing good for others.
- Each week we're talking about rhythms of life we can develop that God can use to do good for others.
- This week we're talking about being sent out into the world.
- Read Luke 5:27-32 (page 705).
- A little background: 1) tax collectors were despised in Jewish culture because they were corrupt and because they worked for the "oppressor"; 2) in Jewish culture, to sit at a table with someone was perceived as a way of sharing their values, lifestyle, goodness or sinfulness.
- Question: How might Jesus' actions be surprising given this context?
- [Focus: Jesus' actions were unacceptable to the religious leaders of the day. Jesus risks his "moral purity" for the sake of hanging out with tax collectors and "sinners".]
- Question: In what ways might Jesus' actions in this text shape the way we ourselves are sent?
- [Focus: Our being sent might mean we end up in some places outside our comfort zone, or better yet, outside the comfort zones of other religious people.]
- Jesus spent regular time in non-religious spaces, as in this text. He was sent by God to such places because that's where he would develop relationships with people who were disconnected from God.
- Question: What are non-church spaces around here to which God might be sending us?
- [Focus: Ideas: sports leagues, civic organizations, coffee shops, workplaces, meetup.com, etc.]

#### Pastoral Prayer

- Consider breaking out into smaller groups of 3-4.
- Appoint a facilitator for each group and equip them to ask their group a question.
- Ask, What is one non-church space you'd like to start intentionally hanging out in? What rhythms can you develop for spending time there?
- Pray for God provide opportunities for new relationships as participants enter non-church spaces.

#### Music

- Choose 1-2 songs that focus on the mission of God and being sent as a church by God.
- Song suggestions: Rising, We Will Shine, Much of You
- Musical options: play the songs on a CD or instruments to listen to or sing along with.
- Remember to have the lyrics available for people either printed or with PowerPoint.

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### Week Six: Putting it All Together

#### Communion Experience

- Thought: Jesus, like Isaiah, in his life and death says, "Here I am, send me." (cf. Isa. 6:1ff.)
- Be sure to describe what communion is and to give an 'out' to any who would rather not participate
- Ask afterward, "Who did God send you to this week?"

#### Pastoral Prayer

- Ask participants, "What's going on in your lives that you want to pray about?"
- Pray for people's responses.

#### Dwelling in the Word

- Text: Genesis 12:1-3
- Encourage people to relax, close their eyes and listen for God. Prepare them to listen for a phrase or a word that sticks out to them in the text.
- Read it one time; read a second time, asking participants to repeat phrases after you; read it a third time; give two minutes of silence.
- After silence, ask: What has God taught you in the last several weeks about blessing other people?

#### Scripture Conversation

- Video: A Thousand Questions (Willow Creek Association; Time: 10:32)
- Question: Which part of this video moved you?
- We've been talking about blessing other people—in other words, doing good for others.
- Particularly about rhythms of life we can develop that God can use to do good for others
- Question: How did the video deal with the tension between the world's problems and blessing?
- Project BLESS has five components: blessing other people; listening to God; eating with others; studying the heart of God; being sent into non-church spaces.
- Question: Which of these five components comes most easily for you?
- Question: Which of these five components do you need to most grow in?
- Question: Imagine: what would happen if all of us lived out the BLESS rhythm every week?

#### Empty Chair Prayer

- Explain: every week we pray for God to fill the empty chair with someone who is searching for God.
- If appropriate, make sure to tell any new people present that their presence is an answer to prayer.
- Ask, "Who is God sending us to this week?"
- Pray for people's responses.

#### Music

- Choose 1-2 songs that focus on being sent by God to bless the world
- Song suggestions: God of this City, How Great is Our God
- Musical options: play the songs on a CD or instruments to listen to or sing along with.
- Remember to have the lyrics available for people either printed or with PowerPoint.