

Listen & Eat

Matthew 9:9-13

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

We are in week two of our *B.L.E.S.S.* series and I hope that you have been praying this week by name for your neighbors, co-workers and friends – the people in your circle of influence that don't have a personal relationship with Jesus. If you missed last weekend, I gave three specific prayers to pray for them, and we listed out six specific prayers to pray over ourselves as we consider taking what we're calling this BLESS challenge.

And this is where it all begins...that's what the "B" in BLESS stands for – it stands for "Begin with Prayer".

Illus. Lobby Floor - After the service today, you are going to have an opportunity to take a sharpie and write the names down of the people you are praying for on the floor of our lobby and as you write their name, breathe a prayer to God. It's a prayer for:

- Reception...
- Revelation...
- Salvation...

And who knows? Because we decide to BLESS them and continually pray for them, they could pray and someday – maybe very soon, ask Jesus to be the Lord of their life.

I want to remind us...THIS is what it's ALL about! It's about people far from Jesus coming to know him in a personal way and me and you...our church doing ANYTHING it takes short of sin to help make it happen! We can't save anyone, only God can do that. However, we do share in the mission of Jesus who in:

Luke 19:10 – “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

The final words of Jesus to his disciples...what we refer to as The Great Commission:

Matt. 28:19 – “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.”

Before we can make disciples, God has to make converts – and this happens as we go into our world and empowered by the Holy Spirit and share the hope of Jesus...we share the message of Jesus which is (GOSPEL – death, burial and resurrection).

THIS is the message we hold to and herald...THIS is the mission that should consume us! When we wake up on Sundays the first thoughts we should have as we consider coming to church is NOT:

- I sure hope they play my favorite song today...

- I sure hope my life group remembered the donuts...
- I sure hope I get a good parking spot so I can get out quicker...
- I sure hope that preacher doesn't go long today...

The FIRST thought we should have when we wake up on Sundays is GRATITUDE that we get to come together as a faith family and worship our great and awesome God, and then secondly, we should be thinking:

- I wonder if we'll baptize today?
- Will we get to see visually and outwardly the miracle that has happened inwardly in people's lives?
- Will I get to see life change today?
- I wonder who will walk the aisle today and show the world they have decided to follow Jesus?

THIS is what it's all about, Church!!! AND we GET to be a part of this! And this BLESS challenge is going to help us, and what I want for EVERY follower of Jesus to experience at some point in their life:

I want you to experience someone you know, work alongside or live near to come to know Jesus because of your prayers and because of your intentional witness in their life! There is just NOTHING like it!

J.C. Ryle - "No true Christian ever goes to heaven alone."

Let's make it our goal that we don't go to heaven alone! Let's make it our goal Champion Forest, to take as many people with us as we can – and it starts with prayer. We need to be praying as often as we can for the names we have written down to come to know Jesus.

But, what's the next step in the BLESS challenge? This is what we are going to look at today. And I'll just use these two words as the title of the message today: **Listen and Eat**

Now, listening and eating go hand and hand. In the Ferguson's book that we are basing this series off of and making available to you, **Dave and John Ferguson** write: **"Active listening coupled with a good meal can catapult a casual acquaintance into a growing friendship."**

Now, this is what we are after...remember what we said last week: Sharing Jesus in the context of genuine friendships should be the easiest conversation we ever have – but this is key: it has to be in the context of a genuine friendship.

The problem is, the longer we follow Jesus the less friends we have that don't know him. The average Christian (according to the BGEA) knows seven people that don't have a personal relationship with Christ – but the reality is, those seven people are not genuine friends...they are more likely casual acquaintances – they are neighbors, co-workers or classmates.

We have interactions with them, but we've never attempted to bring them closer in.

And so, what's the key to taking someone from a casual acquaintance to a genuine friendship? According to BLESS, it happens by combining the practices of listening and eating.

Did Jesus do this? He did, and we are going to look at a passage in just a moment where this occurs, but just to set the stage – did you know that Luke's gospel records ten different instances where Jesus shared a meal with other people?

In fact, his first miracle happened at a wedding feast. One of his most famous miracles was when he took a boy's small fish and bread...he took that little Hebrew Happy Meal and multiplied it and fed five thousand people with it. Before he went to the cross, he went to an upper room and shared a meal with his disciples. After his resurrection, he cooked fish for his disciples on the banks of the Sea of Galilee.

So much GOOD can happen when we slow down, take time to listen – Jesus asked over 300 questions in scripture – he was always getting people to talk:

- He asked the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?"
- He asked the woman at the well in John 4 to get him a drink of water and that started a long, spiritual conversation...
- He constantly asked the religious crowd questions to get them to think about some of the things they believed and taught...

This was the practice of Jesus. He listened to others and he shared a meal with others and often times it was combining these two simple acts that led to a spiritual breakthrough.

Let me share with you one passage of scripture that highlights this and it may be one of my favorite stories of Jesus to read in the New Testament.

Matt. 9:9-13 – "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

As I mentioned last week, this is going to be one of the most practical, easy to apply message series I've ever preached, but before I jump into the application, I want to highlight just a few thoughts as it relates to reaching those far from Christ.

First, I want you to notice...and this is VERY important: **There is no one too far away for Jesus to save.**

Now, this needs to be underlined and highlighted. There is NO ONE too far away or that has done too much to experience the grace, love and mercy of God.

This is what people would have thought about Matthew. He is too far gone for Jesus to love and save. Afterall, he's a tax collector. Anybody written the IRS a "thank you" note lately?!

Tax Collectors at this time were hired out by the Roman Government so they were considered sellouts for the most part. They were also known as cheats because they would charge the people more interest than they needed and skim off the top.

From a social status, tax collectors had the money and resources to live well, but they didn't have many friends. They were excluded from religious worship...not allowed in the local synagogues.

Much like lepers who were considered "unclean", they just didn't have to live outside the city because they had Rome's covering. It's interesting to when you read the gospels and find the word "tax collector" it's usually followed by the term "sinner" which is exactly what we see in (v. 11).

The reputation said it all and to be sure this was no honest way to live. Matthew or Levi as he is also known in the scripture would have been despised...he was a leech...the lowest of the low...and YET Jesus calls him!

And Jesus NOT only calls him, as we know SAVES him and makes him one of his twelve disciples! Matthew becomes a disciple and writes the New Testament book we are reading this morning that bears his name! AMAZING!

Hey, listen to me...let's learn from Matthew's story today. There is NO ONE too far away for Jesus to save!

Illus. Hollie's story – "Jared, you know what it is I like about you? You have always had the decency not to preach at me. I appreciate that and think it's fabulous...after all, the love of Jesus shouldn't be sold like a salesman, and when or if I ever find it, it'll mean that much more. Thanks, Hollie."

Listen to me, NO ONE is too far from Jesus or done too much for Jesus to save them! Secondly, this passage is great because it highlights: **Those far away enjoyed the company of Jesus.**

I LOVE this! Lost people enjoyed the company of Jesus. You know what that means? It means Jesus wasn't a buzzkill! You know some people can light up a room when they leave it! NOT Jesus! Lost people wanted to be around him.

Good question to ask yourself: Do lost people want to be around you? Truly? Would they feel comfortable and at home in your presence? Or would they feel as if everything they did was being scrutinized and judged?

Listen, people who are far away from God are going to live and act like people who live far away from God!

This shouldn't surprise us or take us back, AND it shouldn't stop us from being friends with them. Now, this doesn't mean we approve or affirm their lifestyles or decisions that we make (Jesus never did that!).

I'm just underscoring here the old picture of evangelism that you can't clean a fish before you catch them! We need to learn to be okay with lost people acting like lost people and be like Jesus and LOVE them for it...and LOVE them through it!

I get the feeling...and I get it from scripture that when "sinners" were around Jesus, they didn't feel judged or looked down on...they felt welcome and loved.

Here Jesus is according to (v. 10) – "tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples." Eating with someone was a significant act in the days of the Bible and still is in much of the eastern world.

It was a statement of friendship...acceptance – NOT at what someone did, but of them as a person – they are valued and loved by God and therefore we have time for them and are interested in them. It's the great commandment we LOVE them!

Illus. Lanier Lecture – Darrell Bock – "The best apologetic is to be the relational people we have been called to be (Great Commandment goes together)...we don't work hard enough at understanding where the unbeliever is coming from and why."

We'll come back to this in just a moment when we talk about really listening in the application part of this message, but we're talking about lost people enjoying the company of Jesus...enjoying our company.

Dallas Willard – "The first act of love is always the giving of attention."

I think this is why Jesus was so attractive...WHY they enjoyed being in his company – because he gave people time and attention.

Illus. Who's Your One? (Show Slide) – 8:00 in the Student Ministry Building c/o NAMB – I'll be speaking on Bartimaeus (Mark 10) – "And Jesus stopped..."

This leads to the third part of this passage I want to highlight and then we'll jump into the application:

- There is no one is too far away for Jesus to save.
- Those far away enjoyed the company of Jesus.
- **The mission of Jesus is to reach those who are far away.**

The religious crowd...they can't understand why Jesus – a religious teacher himself is spending time with such people. And Jesus clearly tells them.

Matt. 9:12-13 – “But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Here, Jesus becomes the teacher of the teachers! He says, “Go and learn what this means...and he quotes the prophet Hosea. This verse in its fullness comes from:

Hosea 6:6 – “For I desire steadfast love (i.e. mercy) and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Jesus in affect says, “guys, you are missing the entire point of the law that you study inside and out. The message of Hosea is about God showing love and mercy to those that don't deserve it! The heart of God (If you really knew him), you would know is for people, NOT keeping a bunch of rules (burnt offerings) so that in self-righteousness you can feel like you are good before God.

Jesus says, these guys that I'm having dinner with...they are the whole reason I came! I came to show the lost, the broken, the despised, the lowly – the ones that don't think they matter – these are the ones I'm pursuing and making it a priority to reach!
THIS is why I came...to call sinners to repentance and show them that they are NOT just included in the Kingdom of God, but that the Kingdom of God is FOR THEM – it's FOR the people that know they don't deserve it and could never earn it.

I LOVE this story of Matthew reaching his friends! It shows us the heart of Jesus and it shows us the real danger of being spiritually prideful and arrogant! It shows us the danger and the temptation of forming and living in holy huddles and forgetting that Jesus didn't come to call the righteous...he didn't come so that we could just sit, and soak and wait for him to come back.

Instead, he came to call sinners – and he gives us this same mission! And it IS a mission! We are to be relentless in this...aggressive in this...we need to be thinking about and praying about doing WHATEVER it takes to keep reaching out to those far away from Jesus - and that's what this BLESS challenge is all about!

And so to close this message today out, I'm going to end it on a note of action. Last week the homework was to “begin in prayer” and you are going to continue that...but we are going to add an element for us to think about and consider.

We're talking about listening and eating. And so, from this and based off the passage we studied today, let me close with three points of application.

- 1. Develop genuine friendships with people far away from Jesus.**

This should be the people you are praying for...these are people in your circle of influence that you live near, work with, or sit by in class. I'm not asking you to go out and meet strangers UNLESS there is no one in your circle that is far from God – if that's the case, then by all means go meet some people far from God.

Think about the restaurants you go to...the rec leagues you or your children play in...the gym...the school where your kids go.

This goes back to last week, praying God open my eyes – let me see people as you see them! And once you have that acquaintance, then begins the process of growing and building a genuine friendship with them...and the best way to do this?

Listen to them...listen with care and concern...talk less and ask more questions – the best thing you could say is, “Tell me more about that...”

Listening shows you care...and maybe combine it with eating – this is the next point of application:

2. Share a meal with those you are praying for and building a genuine friendship with.

Okay, here's where it gets fun! Now, I know what some of you thinking...Jarrett, I don't want to have people over to my house – I'm not comfortable with that...I don't cook so well.” And I get this...I really do.

First, let me say this: People don't care as much about what your house looks like as you think they do, In fact, when they come over and see that it's not spick and span – that's awesome! Helps people see you're normal!

Now, if you are a hoarder and there's cats running around everywhere, you gotta get that fixed! Ha!

Truly though...you don't have to have a spotless house to have people over. Be real. You don't have to cook or even be able to cook...order it in! Don't fall in the trap that it has to be a three-course meal!

Again, the goal is to have people over to treat them and listen to them...you're doing this to build a genuine friendship - that's all there is to it!

Henri Nouwen – “When we invite friends for a meal, we do much more than offer them food for their bodies. We offer friendship, fellowship, good conversation, intimacy and closeness...”

Illus. House Party kits – (Cast vision – Sunday evenings, pick packet up in lobby today – missions team will help you!).

So, we are going to develop genuine friendships with people far away from Jesus...this is who we are praying for by name. Then we are going to share a meal with those you are praying for and building a genuine friendship with.

If those you have written down are co-workers this should be a little easier for you...take them to eat one day. Show interest by asking questions and genuinely getting to know them.

And then here's the third point of application. We want to be like Matthew and eventually:

3. At the right time, introduce those you are praying for and sharing meals with to Jesus.

The key – “at the right time”...it takes time! And you have to have wisdom and discernment...you have to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as to when you start having spiritual conversations.

Illus. Hollie, Eric, David (different times)

Going back to Dr. Darrell Bock from this past weekend. He was talking about a winning apologetic. He said, and I am paraphrasing: “Most people who come to know Christ...you talk to them, and they will tell you it started with meeting a Christian and over time seeing that Christian live out their faith in an authentic way that ultimately they asked the Christian, “Why?”.

This is it! The power of listening and eating...the power of having a genuine friendship with someone who is far away from God.

What we're talking about today is a simple way to BLESS people and we are going to talk more about the SHARE part of this next week.

So, let's pray and then let's go write some names of people we are praying for on the floor of our lobby and in doing so, we are asking God to bring them to himself and write their names in the book of life.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.