

“Start with Your Heart”

Luke 6:12-16

Series: Friends for God Week 2. B – Begin with Prayer

A Message adapted by Doug Hoglund from Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL
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There once was a guy who wanted to focus completely on prayer. So he joins a monastery. This very strict monastery requires him to make a vow of prayer and complete silence. He's only allowed to say 2 words every 7 years. When the first seven years pass, the chief monks bring him in and ask for his two words. "Cold floors," he says. The head monks nod and send him away. After seven more years, the chief monks bring him back and ask for his two words. He clears his throats and says, "Bad food." The chief monks nod and send him away. Seven more years pass. They bring him in for his two words. He says, "I quit." The chief monk replies, "We're not surprised, since you got here you've done nothing but complain."

In our Friends for God series, our theme this week is B – Begin with Prayer. To make friends for God you will likely say a whole lot more than two words. But before you say any words it is essential for us to pray first. Christians are accused of talking and preaching at people. The Lord asks us to begin by praying for people. If you want to make friends for God begin with prayer.

Last Sunday we discovered "We Got a Friend in Thee" – Jesus calls us His friends, He's on a mission to make friends for God and He wants to do this through His friends – you and me. His Friend Making Mission has three dimensions: REACH – Jesus asks us to go and reach people who are far from God, RESTORE – Jesus sends us to restore God's dream for the world – to work for a world without conflict, hunger, homelessness, racism, injustice or poverty, and finally to REPRODUCE His mission so those we reach will reach and restore others over and over. At the heart of all three is Jesus' Mission. He wants to BLESS the world through us.

This is God's plan from the very beginning. In Genesis, God says to Abraham:
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. Genesis 12:2,3

God blesses His friend Abraham with family, finances and faith. Yet the goal is not to load up Abraham or us with a lot of blessings. God blesses Abraham and us to **BE** a blessing. You are blessed to bless others! To Bless is to give a gift or to do good for someone. One definition of "Blessings" is "a gift from God, which gives temporal or spiritual benefit." Most people think Christians go around converting people. The word "convert" only appears 8 times in the Bible and in each case it's not the proper or best translation for the original word. By contrast, the word "bless" appears 389 times in the Bible. When you Bless you give something to someone – a gift, a helping hand, a kind word. When you Convert you take something from them – you get them to see or do things your way. This is why many Christians don't want to share the Good News or talk about their faith. They wrongly think the goal is to get people to convert to their way of thinking, believing or behaving. God blesses us so we will bless others not convert them. Converting is all about making clones. Blessing is all about making friends.

Someone did a study of “Blessers versus Converters.” They researched two teams of missionaries who went to Thailand with different strategies. The first team, “the Converters” went with the sole intention of converting people to become Christians. The second team, “the Blessers” focused on “blessing” people. They would say, “I’m here to bless whoever comes my way.” OR “I want to be a blessing to the people in my community.” The study followed them for a couple years and here is what they discovered: The “Blessers” had a greater social impact than the “Converters.” They improved the lives of people and the community. What’s surprising is the “Blessers” saw almost 50x as many people come to faith in Jesus as the “Converters!” The “Blessers” helped 50 times more people find their way back to God! Bottomline: The best way to accomplish Jesus’ mission of reaching and restoring is to be a “Blesser!”

How do you be a Blessor? Here are 5 simple practices which spell the word BLESS.

B – Begin with Prayer

L – Listen

E – Eat

S – Serve

S – Story

These are the things we do when we make friends. We pray for each other, listen to each other, eat together, help each other, share our stories with each other. That’s the way we bless each other. That’s the way Jesus blesses others through us. Starting today we’ll spend the next five weeks examining each one of these practices.

So where do you start? With your heart. You **Begin with Prayer**. Before you open your mouth, start by praying in the quiet of your heart. Eventually you will say more than two words like the monk in my story. But in the beginning do what Jesus does. Jesus starts his day with prayer. Jesus starts His whole ministry with prayer.

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Luke 4:1

Jesus goes off into the wilderness to fast and pray and confront the evil one. He begins his mission on earth with prayer. Before Jesus selects those who will join His mission, He prays.

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him. Luke 6:12-16

Now, if it were me, I might be tempted to skip the prayer part and pick some obvious first round draft choices. Not Jesus. He spends the whole night in prayer before selecting the Twelve. The stakes are high. The Twelve will be the first ones He sends out to bless the world. If Jesus is God, you may wonder, why does He have to pray? There are a lot of answers to this question but the crucial one is Jesus models for us what we are to do. Always begin every important decision and action with prayer. Start with your heart.

That's what Dean does. Dean has a ministry to college students at Michigan State University (we won't hold that against him). Every morning Dean prays for "divine appointments." He asks God to show him people he can bless. One morning an appointment was cancelled. Instead of looking at his phone, email or Facebook he prayed, "God, how do you want me to use this time?" He sat still and the name Janice, one of the students, came to him. He sensed he was supposed to explain to her how she could find her way back to Jesus. Janice had never been to church, was not a follower of Jesus but she did attend one of their small groups. So he called and asked if could meet her over coffee. She said, "sure." When they met he said, "Janice, I was praying and your name came to mind and I felt like I was supposed to share with you how you can become a follower of Jesus." And she just starts crying. Dean immediately recoiled and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have just blurted that out... I'm not being very sensitive." Then Janice interrupted, "No. That's not it. I just can't believe that you are here. Last night I went to a Bible study in my dorm. They got to talking about what it means to be a Christian and I couldn't stop thinking about it. All night I couldn't sleep. I didn't know what to do. So I prayed this morning, asking God that He would bring someone to me today to tell me how to become a Christian." She smiled and said, "And here you are. I just can't believe it!" For Dean every day of his life is a mini-adventure. Every day he begins with prayer asking God to use him to bless the world.

This is my simple challenge to you. Every morning, when you get out of bed, when you do your daily quiet time, when you travel to work or school, pray this prayer: "Lord who do you want me to Bless today?" Remember, we are not doing this to convert people or convince them to be Presbyterians. We want to give them a gift from God. This may mean you give them the gift of your time and attention by listening to them. This may mean that you invite them to enjoy coffee or a meal with you. You might lend them a hand, help them out or even let them help you. You might send them a text or email – "God brought you to mind. What can I pray for you?" You can offer them an encouraging word or give them some affirmation. "Great job on that presentation." "You are amazing!" "I appreciate your positive attitude." Ask God to show you three people you can bless this week. Then come back and tell us what happened.

Now I must tell you – if you start each day with a prayer to bless others it will be exciting, adventuresome and surprising. If you follow God's leadings some crazy stuff may start happening. Just ask Louie Webber. One day Louie went to the mall and noticed this guy sitting on a bench. Suddenly he had this strange sensation: "Go tell that guy God loves him." But Louie didn't want to do that. Would you? Would you walk up to a complete stranger and say, "Hey, God loves you." So he does what most of us do, he shrugs it off.

Later, Louie comes out of a store in another part of the mall and there's the same guy sitting on a different bench. Once again, Louie gets an inner nudge, "Go over there and tell that guy God loves him." Once again, Louie ignores the message. A third time he sees the same guy. So Louie finally says, "Alright!" He walks up to the guy and says, "I don't want to seem weird or anything, but I feel like I'm supposed to tell you that God loves you." And the guy's eyes filled up with tears. He says, "This morning I was at the end of my rope. I told God, 'If you're real, show me You love me today'. And you're the third complete stranger in the mall today who's come up and said those words to me. No one's ever said it to me before, and now it happens 3 times in one day."

Join us each week for 5 simple ways to be a Friend-Maker for God and B.L.E.S.S. others.

- **Daily:** God please show me who you want me to bless.
- **Weekly:** When you gather with your family, your friends, your Growth group start by asking, “Who did you bless this week?”

God and those you Bless will say two words: Thank You!