



Theme: B.L.E.S.S.- Loving Others to Change the World **“Finding Faith in Friendship”**

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁵ **Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “My child, your sins are forgiven.”**
– Mark 2:5

*For this series of sermons, we invite you to read the book, **B.L.E.S.S. – 5 Everyday Practices to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World** by Dave and Jon Ferguson. We encourage you to pick up a copy, or download one, and **read chapter 1 this week**. The readings below will complement this chapter, focusing on the idea of friendship.*

Monday, September 19 – Read Mark 2:1-12. This incident so awed Jesus’ followers that the first three gospels all tell the story nearly word for word. The man in the story badly needed healing. By himself, however, he wasn’t going to be able to get near Jesus. With effort and ingenuity, his friends brought him into Jesus’ presence. Jesus healed him inwardly even before he restored his ability to walk.

- 🔪 Jesus saw the paralyzed man’s deepest need differently than many (maybe even his “stretcher bearers”) would have. Jesus told him, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” In what ways can friends be like Jesus’ physical presence to heal and encourage one another? In what ways can friends show God’s forgiveness and grace without judgement?
- 🔪 Have you ever been mentally, emotionally, or physically paralyzed, and had people who cared about you carry you through the situation? Have you ever been part of carrying someone you cared about through a crisis? In either case, what did it take to “dig through the roof” to meet the other person’s need?

Prayer: *Dear God, I admit I need healing but sometimes I ignore my need and think I can do it all on my own. Help me to lean on others and lean on you. Help me to see where I might be a stretcher-bearer for others. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 20 – Read Romans 12:9-21. Today’s Scripture twice uses a term that sounds so ordinary we might miss the fact that it’s a key New Testament idea: “one another.” God did not call people to a solo journey through life. First Century Christians were a community,

strengthened in their power to “overcome evil with good” by their steady, loving commitment to one another.

☛ How have other people treated you? How have you interacted with others who are not followers of Jesus? Have you seen Christians living up to the ideals in today’s reading? How can you live up to those ideals? What wounds do you have from the past? How can God and God’s people help to heal those wounds? How might you help heal the wounds of others through friendship?

☛ “Hurt people hurt people,” is something we see every day. Jesus came to offer a new way of “being” with one another, which Paul summed up as, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.” Think about Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi—and Jesus. They “overcame evil with good.” What is your experience of living this way? How can we be a better witness in the world by befriending others who are not followers of Jesus?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you have called us to love one another, but sometimes I find that hard, mostly because I feel hurt and have not asked for healing. May I experience healing in my heart and soul so I might love others. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 21 – Read Colossians 3:12-17. Colossians didn’t say we are, “members of an organization,” but, “members of one body.” The image suggests that Jesus connects us to each other organically, as a leg or arm is joined to our body.

☛ Today’s verses are about what it means to be “holy.” What kind of person does the word “holy” bring to your mind? How do, “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience,” enrich your sense of what it means for you to be holy? In what ways is the close connection to others vital for living truly holy lives?

☛ Christian music didn’t start with current contemporary Christian artists or hymn writers from the 1800s. The first Christians shared, “psalms [Israel’s traditional music], hymns, and songs from the Spirit [probably newly written].” When has music drawn you closer to others, and filled your heart with gratitude to God? How can music be a part of developing friendship?

Prayer: *Lord God, you long to have your Holy Spirit come into my heart. You long for this not just for me, but so I might let down my guard and connect with others as part of your body. Give me the courage to do that. Amen.*

Thursday, September 22 – Read 1 John 4:7-12. When John wrote, “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another,” he was writing about a process in which the Holy Spirit grows in us the ability to love rather than to hurt.

☛ A common view of love is expressed in the line, “Love is a feeling.” But the Greek word agape, which John used to describe what God did for us in Jesus, wasn’t about warm, fuzzy feelings. When have you been upheld or comforted by God’s gritty, determined kind of love (from God directly or through another person)?

☛ In contrast to “love is a feeling,” when has loving called you beyond feelings, and helped you doggedly act in another person’s best interests? How might that be a witness to others, when we choose to do the loving thing, rather than waiting until it “feels right”?

Prayer: *O God, you call to love a better way by saying “I love you” when we choose to love, even though we don’t feel like it. I confess that many times I don’t want to do that God! May be humble enough to choose love today. Amen.*

Friday, September 23 – Read John 13:31-35. We read yesterday that God’s love is the motive and the power by which we love one another. God’s love for us was not distant or abstract. It took human form in Jesus. With the Roman cross awaiting him on the next day, right after Judas left into the darkness to betray him, Jesus gave his followers this call to love one another.

☛ A non-religious friend you invite to join you in worship says, “I don’t know. So many churches make so many claims. How do I know you guys are on the right track?” What do you say? What does it take to live into Jesus’ answer to that question: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”?

☛ Imagine you were one of Jesus’ followers. After three years of daily contact, he said he wouldn’t be physically with you anymore. But he would send the Holy Spirit, and “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Could you accept the sincere (but at times faulty) love of others as a sign of Jesus’ love to you? Can you today?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to be a witness to others by how I love those around me. You have called me to love others the way you love me, with no strings attached. I know that is impossible without you, so help me to carry you in my heart every moment of every day. Amen.*

Saturday, September 24 – Read Luke 22:19-32. As they listened to Jesus words about giving his body, and a new covenant in his blood, the disciples were still human. So, “a dispute also arose among them as to which of them was ... greatest.” Jesus repeated that “great” has a different meaning in his kingdom. Then he warned Peter that he would fall but gave him hope and a crucial role in the community: “When you have returned, strengthen your brothers and sisters.”

(Common English Bible)

☛ Jesus didn’t just give his followers a “rule sheet” and say, “Use these policies for a new sacrament I want you to keep.” For what reasons do you believe he instead gathered them together for the first Lord’s Supper? In what ways can our Communion times draw us together and bolster our belonging with one another as members of Christ’s body? When has Jesus touched your heart at communion, making forgiveness real to you or convicting you of a way God can empower you to heal a broken relationship?

☛ Our Communion table at Summit Church is an “open table,” meaning you don’t have to be a member of our church, or any church, to receive the gift of grace offered in the bread and the cup. How can we help others feel invited and loved in this way?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, the next time a gather with others for a meal, help to look at each person and give thanks. May I remember you at that meal, knowing you gave it all so I might remember your grace and forgiveness. Amen.*