

Training Session 10 - BLESS Rhythms: Love God and People

Objective

To equip you with a plan to love and value people with the love of Jesus

Key Text

Colossians 4:2-6

Bible Study

The Mission Statement of Movement Mortgage says that we exist to love and value people. If we miss this one, not only do we fail to accomplish our reason for being as a company, but we fail to accomplish at least half of our reason for being as humans. Jesus summarized our reason for being as humans when he said something roughly like this, “You exist to love God and love people” (Matthew 22: 37-40). My guess is that you, like me, would rather not be off target on our reason for existence as a company and as humans, which is why last week we discussed developing Biblical rhythms to life that center around loving God and loving people. In our training session this week, we’re going to develop a plan to love and value people that is prayerful, intentional, and transformational. We talk often about scale in the business world, but what if we figured out a way to scale the love of Jesus? We’re going to do just that in this lesson!

Hear me say loud and clear what my mentor said to me many times: we don’t love people to share Jesus, but we share Jesus to love people.¹ If we simply love people in order to share the love of Jesus that would turn *people* into *projects*. Yet, if we love people well, then we will share with them the source of all love. I John 4:9 says, “God is love.” This means that there is an eternal source of love that actually exists in the person of God. He is love. Period. Love defines who God is. And there simply is no way to experience the healing, restoring, awakening, filling, forgiving, stirring, strengthening, rescuing, and redeeming love of God apart from Jesus. No person comes to know the love of God apart from Jesus because He is *the* way to God, not simply a way (John 14:6). He is *the* mediator of God’s love, not simply one of many mediators (1 Timothy 2:5). So the loving thing to do is introduce our friends to the one who provides *the* way for them to know and experience the eternal storehouse of love that is God.

Think about it. If you knew of a pill your friend could take that would heal them of their pancreatic cancer, could you really say, with integrity, that you love your friend if you didn’t share that news with them? This is why loving people with the love and message of Jesus Christ is critical, because so much more than a cure for cancer is offered in and through His love.

At Movement, we define love as acting in the long-term best interest of another. Heaven and hell are real places where we will spend an eternally long time (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 21:4-8). While loving people simply to help them punch a ticket to heaven ignores the here and now heavenly realities that are possible for life in Christ, we also can’t

honestly say we are loving someone if we don't help connect them to the person named Jesus who can secure an eternity of love for them.

Historically, this is how the love of Christ spread to so many people across the globe. People encountered a love unlike any other in Jesus and couldn't help but share it with their colleagues, friends, and family members. For example, Levi (the hated tax collector) experienced the white-hot love of Christ and he invited his friends to a banquet because he loved them and wanted them to know the love that was transforming him. Today, many of Levi's buddies are eternally rejoicing in the love of Jesus Christ because he shared the love of Jesus with them (Mark 2:14-15). Or think about the father of the sick child who encountered the healing love of Christ and then shared it with his whole household. Right now, all of them are swimming in the love of Christ and will for eternity (John 4:53). Then there is Lydia, a wealthy business woman, who experienced the wondrous love of Christ and shared it with her entire household, all of whom are sitting around the fire of God's love in heaven today (Acts 16:13-16).

The reality is that we will pass from this earth just like Levi, the father of the sick child, and Lydia, but one thing will remain: the love of Jesus Christ. If we love people, then we will share this love so the people we love may experience the boundless storehouse of God's love for eternity. One historian has said: "The primary change agents in the spread of faith...were the men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner, and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion."² No pretense. No apologetic discourse. Just sharing the most valuable and precious love in the universe. Even today the love of Christ keeps spreading and the church keeps growing through webs of loving relationships. The Institute of American Church Growth asked over 14,000 people: "What or who was responsible for you coming to Christ and your church?" Almost 90% responded: "A friend or relative." OK, you say, I would like to share the love of Christ. But how? Glad you asked....

How can I share the love of Christ?

Paul, who shared the love of Christ more effectively than anyone in history, gave the Colossians a plan for how to share the love of Christ. His blueprint in Colossians provides a great plan for us to share the love of Christ.

1. Pray with thanksgiving

Colossians 4:2 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and **thankful**." Notice two key words that Paul lays out for prayer: watchful and thankful. We begin the process of sharing the love of Christ with watchful, thankful prayer. Why does Paul say we should be devoted to thankful prayer as a way to share the love of Christ? Because you share the things for which you are thankful. If you are truly thankful for a new song or a favorite restaurant you found or a new television series, you will share it, naturally, with friends. How much more so the love of Christ? If your heart is flooded with thanksgiving over the love of Christ, then you will share this love with others. Likewise, if your heart is filled with thanksgiving over the people in your life, then that will change the way you relate to them. Even if God is opening a door of opportunity for you to love your Crazy Cousin Eddie, the place to begin is with thanksgiving!

2. *Pray watchfully for open doors of opportunity to love people*

Second, Paul encourages watchful prayer. Again, Colossians 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being **watchful** and thankful.” Praying watchfully means that when you go to work and walk around your neighborhood you are praying with your eyes open and asking Jesus to give you open doors of opportunity to share His love in word and deed. This is what Paul says to do in Colossians 4:3, “*Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message.*” As you pray for open doors to love and value people with the love of Christ, watch what God will do. You will be astounded at the open doors God swings wide open for you to love in word and deed!

3. *Clarify your motives through watchful prayer*

Watchful prayer also involves vigilantly being on guard for false motives as you seek to love and value people. Many people have negative feelings towards “evangelism” and often it is because they sniff ulterior motives. Our motivation to share the love of Christ should not be to win an argument, to “win souls,” or to get people to clean their act up and start living right. The right motive for sharing the love of Christ is love for God and people that is an overflow of your heart—a gospel gratitude. “For Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14) to love people.

Put another way, it is love for love’s sake. We love people because it is the right thing to do and it is completely without condition. There is no pressure on us to “save or convert” anyone. God does those things, and when He does our friends will respond to His love the way a bride does who is madly in love with her groom. This means that loving people is not a means to an end. It is a good end in and of itself. We don’t love people so that we can share the love of Jesus with them. No, we share the love of Jesus with them because we love them.

4. *Focus your efforts*

Paul encourages us to make “*the most of every opportunity*” (Colossians 4:4b), which requires us to focus on loving a few well. We can’t love everyone everywhere in the same way, but we can and we should love fiercely, with focus and intentionality, where God is opening doors. In fact, God is counting on us to do so. We are His “Plan A” to love the world and He doesn’t have a Plan B. So let’s focus our love by creating a list of people to love. Instead of a “To Do” list with projects, we are making a “To Love” list with people.

The number of people we can effectively love will differ according to our age and stage of life. Moreover, our “To Love” list may change from time to time as God works in the lives of people and as we pray watchfully. He will open some doors and close others, so our list will constantly change. Take a moment to identify one to six people in your network of relationships who will be the special focus of your love and write them down. When you get home, put these initials onto an 3x5 card on your bathroom mirror so you see them often and are reminded to pray for them. Remember to use initials—it might be a little awkward if your friend saw their name on your mirror!

5. *Cultivate a loving relationship*

Paul encourages the Colossians to, “*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders*” (Colossians 4:5). For example, the guy on the bullhorn outside of the stadium yelling, “Repent or burn in hell forever,” lacks wisdom. Could God use even this approach to reveal His love to people? Yes, He’s God, but this approach ignores the wisdom of how people have come to know the love of Christ for thousands of years, which is in relationships of love. Often many of us are the equivalent of the bullhorn guy because we fail to act with wisdom by cultivating loving relationships before sharing the gospel.

Bill Hybels & Mark Mittelberg³ tell a story of meeting some neighbors who had just moved in on their street, and Mark invited them to an event their church was putting on. The neighbor graciously declined. As Mark walked away from the conversation, he thought, “What am I doing, I teach this stuff! Barbeque first!” When they did have the neighbors over for a BBQ, he agreed with his wife that they would not bring up spiritual matters until they had eaten with them several times, but to their amazement, their neighbors wanted to talk about faith that first night! We’ll call this the BBQ first principle. Have your neighbors over for a BBQ first before moving into spiritual matters. For each person on your ‘focus list’ consider the following: What changes in your life would make you a better friend and pointer to the love of Christ? What deeds of love and kindness would show concern for your friend? How might you use hospitality? Which of your Christian friends would this person get along with especially well? For each person on your ‘focus list’ identify a next step to cultivate your relationship. Take time right now to identify the next step you hope to take with one of the individuals on your list.

6. *Expose your faith*

Rather than dump your faith on your friend, pray for and look for opportunities to expose your faith in a natural, authentic way. This works best when God opens a door and you spontaneously respond in a way that shows the difference Jesus has made in you—this is “*making the most of every opportunity*” (Colossians 4:4b). It also can and should be intentionally planned—this is being “*wise in the way you act toward outsiders (or your neighbors)*” (Colossians 4:5) Consider: How might you initiate a conversation about spiritual things? What felt needs does your friend speak about and how has Jesus worked in you or others you know to address those felt needs?

7. *Invite them to come and see*

Throughout history, the gospel has spread as Christians have invited their friends, colleagues, and family members to “come and see” Jesus (John 1:35-51, etc.). This simple invitation still applies today, for wherever God’s people gather, Jesus is in our midst. What could you invite your friend to that might expose them to the love of God? Consider: Movement Worship Night, Movement Mentoring, a church service, volunteering at Movement School or Center, Curious Discussion Forums, etc.

8. *Love Does Stories*

We will often begin our Movement Mentoring group with stories of how God has opened doors of opportunity for you to love people with the love of Christ. We call this a “Love Does” story because we believe love is a verb and involves actively sharing the love of Christ in word and deed. Let’s go forth and love people to life in Christ!

Discussion Questions:

1. We don't love people to share Jesus, but we share Jesus to love people. Discuss.
2. The Institute of American Church Growth asked over 14,000 people: "What or who was responsible for you coming to Christ and your church?" Almost 90% responded: "A friend or relative." Discuss.
3. Who are the people on your "To Love" list"?
4. Describe the steps you are going to take to cultivate a loving relationship with each person on your "To Love" list".
5. With the "BBQ first" principle in mind, are any of the people you believe God is calling you to love ready for you to expose your faith to them in some winsome way?
6. With the "BBQ first" principle in mind, are any of the people you believe God is calling you to love ready for you to invite them to "come and see" Jesus?

Endnotes

1. Dick Kaufmann drilled this into me during my time in San Diego and he modeled this better than most anyone I've ever encountered. So many people have come to know the love of Jesus through his lifetime of love.
2. Bruce B Barton, *Life Application Commentary Bible: Acts* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 178 (quote attributed to Kenneth Scott Latourette).
3. Bill Hybels, Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Zondervan, 1996), chapter 7.