

# B.L.E.S.S.

*5 Everyday Ways Love Your Neighbor and Change the World*

## Eat Together

### Series Overview

Jesus said we're to love our neighbors. As part of our B.L.E.S.S. campaign based on the book by Dave and Jon Ferguson, in this sermon series, we want to consider practical, everyday ways that we can love our neighbors, to bless them, and in so doing, point them to the greatest blessing of all: a life-changing relationship with Jesus.

### Sermon Introduction

As Dave and Jon Ferguson write, "Something special happens when we gather at the table" (B.L.E.S.S., p. 77). When you share a meal, you're more likely to move past a lot of the small-talk that constitutes so many social interactions. No surprise then that Jesus was known for eating with all sorts of people—wealthy, poor, religious elites, and "sinners." Jesus didn't really do small-talk. He wanted to get to the heart of a person. If you want to build a friendship, eating together is a great place to start.

### Passage: Matthew 9:9-13 (NIV)

Matt. 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

Matt. 9:10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples.

Matt. 9:11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

Matt. 9:12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

Matt. 9:13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

### Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Read the passage. What stood out to you? Was there anything that you found surprising or confusing?
2. In Jesus' day, tax collectors were known for cheating their own neighbors to support the Roman government and line their own pockets. Needless to say, they weren't very

popular! Why do you think Jesus would call Matthew—a tax collector—to be one of his disciples?

3. Rather than removing Matthew away from his social circles, made up of tax collectors and “sinners,” what does Jesus do (v. 10)? Does that surprise you? Do you think Christians typically do a good job of imitating Jesus when it comes to associating with “sinners”?
4. Why do you think the Pharisees were so shocked by what Jesus was doing (v. 11)? How did Jesus’ associating with “sinners” mess with their theological categories?
5. Read vv. 12-13. What do you make of Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees? What do you think God means when he says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (cf. Hosea 6:6)?
6. Is there anyone, or any group of persons, you think is outside the reach of God’s grace? Ask yourself: would you be willing to invite them over for dinner to show them God’s mercy? What would stop you?
7. What is your main takeaway from this passage? What difference does it make for you?

## Prayer

*Often a position of submission helps us physically connect with the spiritual reality of meeting God. A posture of kneeling with open hands can demonstrate our willingness to submit to God’s power.*

- Praise God for his presence and power in your life. Thank him that he condescends to associate with you by his mercy and grace.
- Confess any hardness of heart you feel toward “sinners,” your lack of mercy, grace, and compassion for them.
- Ask Jesus to soften your heart and to show you opportunities to love them in the way that he has loved you.
- Continue to pray for the person or family you’ve committed to bless:

“Heavenly Father, I want to be a blessing to \_\_\_\_\_. Help me to take the time to listen to what they have to say, eat with them, serve them, and share my story with them so that they could see You in me. I pray that they would know You the way that I know You. Use me to make the introduction. Amen.”