

I ❤️ MY CITY

Week One

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for meeting us here. Thank you for all the goodness and love you bring to our lives. Help us to be aware and open to your presence and leadership in our group today. Amen.

Talk it Over

This week we kicked off our annual series, "I Heart (*insert your city name here*)". This series is all about being intentional in loving our "hood".

- How long have you lived in your city? What brought you here in the first place?
- What is your favorite thing about your city?

Read Series Theme Verse John 1:14 (MSG)

The Bible tells us that Jesus shows us what God is like and what real love looks like. In a broken and segregated cultural, Jesus stood for equality, he removed lines that divide insiders and outsiders. He went out of his way to bless people — especially those marginalized by society. He brought peace and healing, and so much more. In other words, Jesus came and revealed the Kingdom of God here on earth.

This week we looked at two series questions, let's review them now and then talk them over together:

Series Question 1: What if every church, which is a collection of Christians, blessed every city?

Series Question 2: What if every Christian blessed every neighbor?

- What initial thoughts do these questions stir up in you?
- While some churches and Christians do this well, what do you think keeps these sorts of questions from mattering more to believers? Please note, the intent of this conversation is not to assume anyone has bad intentions. Rather, as we talk this through, it's important to remember good intentions without deliberate practices can often leave us misguided in the end.

Read Matthew 28:18 (NLT) and Genesis 12:2-3 (NIV)

If we are going to love our city and our neighborhood well, we must understand: We are sent people to bless people where we live, work, and play. In a culture that teaches us to watch out for ourselves, it's important for believers to remember a core narrative of the Bible is about followers of Jesus living to share God's love with others. God wants those who know him to live on mission with him.

- Looking at where you live, work, and play, when do you find it easiest to care for the needs of others? Why is that the case?
- Looking at where you live, work, and play, when do you find it most difficult to care for the needs of others? Why is that the case?
- While we typically try to stay away from solving one another's problems, let's brainstorm creative solutions to combat the things that make it hard to connect with people where we live, work, or play. (For example, if your neighbors don't spend much time outside, what are other solutions to gain more face time with them?)

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- Much of this series rests in the idea that God made us to be conduits of his blessings. On a basic level this means God has given us good things with the intention of us extending those good things given to us with others.
 - In what ways are you seeing God use you to bless other this season?
 - In what ways have you been blessed by others' blessings this season or in seasons past?

This week we also revisited the B.L.E.S.S. practice. This practice is about five simple rhythms that foster friendship and hopefully enable able to share Jesus in the context of a genuine, loving relationship. Let's review the five rhythms now.

B: Being in prayer. *Blessing others isn't about forcing our way onto people but rather us aligning our hearts with God and us wanting God's best to prevail in the life of others.*

L: Listen. *Listening is about genuinely getting to know others.*

E: Eat. *Eating with others is a spiritual practice that helps foster love, respect, trust, and mutual friendship.*

S: Serve them. *Serving others comes naturally when you care about them.*

S: Story. *Once friendship is established we earn the right to share our Jesus story and the Jesus story in organic ways. Beyond earning the right to share, mutual sharing is a natural part of healthy friendship.*

- As we walk out these rhythms we need remember people are not projects, our love is intended to come with 'no strings attached', and we can share in friendship and bless people even when they show no interest in Jesus. These practices are about sharing life with others in the context of genuine love. In your own words, what does it mean to make someone a project?
- How can we ensure we practice these rhythms from a healthy, kind, and genuine place?
- Tell us about a person who blessed you through habits like this B.L.E.S.S model.

Read John 5:17 (NLT)

As we aim to B.L.E.S.S. and love others well, it's important we embrace prayer along the whole journey. Prayer is both how we discover our mission and how we do our mission. The Bible refers to this as 'walking in the Spirit'. Along these same lines, as people looking to B.L.E.S.S. and love others well, it's crucial we understand God is already working where we live, work, and play. The question is how is God inviting us to join him on his mission.

- What dangers might come from well-intended Christians looking to bless others but not taking the time to slow down and prayerfully consider how God is at work in a given persons life already?
- Is there someone in your life or a current area of life (think live, work, or play) you are thinking you might need to be more intentional with?
- Looking at where you are at this season, what are some prayers you might want to start praying to help you be a conduit of God's blessing?

This series ends with our big serve weekend taking place. On serve weekend, we are essentially going to close the doors to the church, mobilize thousands of volunteers through service projects, and be the church in our community.

- Has everyone in this group signed up for a project? Is there a project for us to serve together in? To see a list of projects, visit iheartcv.com. For questions, email serve@eastlakechurch.com.

Closing Prayer

God, thank you for inviting us into your mission. Help us to learn to love others like you love them. Open our eyes to see the needs of those around us. We want to be conduits of your goodness. Amen.

How To Use this Discussion Guide

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The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.

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