

.....A Year of.....
BLESSING



Leader Guide

Group
Real. Bold. Love.

Session 1:

.... A Life of *Blessing*

Prep

Welcome to your first session of Where Moms Connect: A Year of Blessing. The main preparation instructions for the sessions are easy, and many are the same (lighting, music, prayer) for each session. The supplies and the setup for this first session are inexpensive and simple.

You'll need:

- One clear glass jar or vase.
- Colored marbles, large glass beads, or decorative glass stones. You'll need enough for each woman attending to have at least one and about 20 more to use for demonstration.

To prepare for this first session:

- Place marbles or glass stones on tables where women are seated. Keep at least 20, with a glass vase, for use during your demonstration.
- Read the entire lesson at least once (twice is better, though!) so you're comfortable with the content.
- Have music ready to play softly in the background. You can use a CD player or MP3 player and any appropriate music of your choosing.
- Check the room to be sure the lighting is adjusted, the temperature is comfortable, and so on.
- Take time to pray for the moms who will be joining you.

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Connecting Together

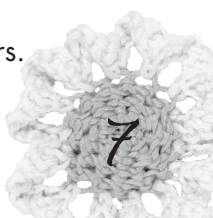
- Cheerfully welcome women to Where Moms Connect.

- Be sure to introduce yourself—even if you think everyone knows you. ☺
- Since this is your very first session, take time to share the current theme of "A Year of Blessing," with a brief overview and explanation of the topics that your group will explore together in the weeks and months ahead.
- Share any information a person newer to your group might need to know such as where restrooms are located, where the coffee is, when your regular meeting times are, and so on.
- Invite those who may be sitting on the fringes to move to a table with others. Let women know there will be lots of conversation, so they'll need to sit with at least two others so they can participate.
- Invite moms to go ahead and turn to the Session 1 section of *A Mom's Book of Blessing*. Let any moms who don't have a book know how they can get one. Each mom needs her own copy.

Blessing Stories

Today we're going to start a year of blessing together! We want to count a lot of blessings in the next year, so let's get started right now! What blessings are you thankful for? Name the first one or two that pop into your head. For me...

Share an example of what blessings you are thankful for to model the type of sharing you would like women to do. This also gives moms a moment to think of their own answers.



Now turn to one person next to you and share a few of the blessings you're thankful for today. Be sure to share your name too!

Allow women a minute or two to share; then have them return their attention to you. Then invite women to call out a few of the things they shared with their partners. As each woman shares, drop a colored glass stone or marble into your clear glass vase, counting "one blessing, two blessings..." and so on. Make sure everyone can see you and the vase. Stop after about eight to ten blessings have been shared.

We have some wonderful blessings to be thankful for!

If you like this idea of counting blessings, consider keeping a jar and a pile of colorful stones with your weekly supplies, and begin each session this year with a time of sharing blessings. Each week moms can add more stones to the jar and see how it fills over the year. You might discover you have so many blessings that you'll need several jars as the months go by!

Connecting to the Topic

Let's have some fun counting a few more of our blessings. You know how some little kids give their moms heartfelt gifts like dandelion bouquets, torn paper with crayon scribbles, and pre-chewed gum. One little boy even gave his mom a dead worm draped over a stick!

How about you? What's the strangest, funniest, or maybe yuckiest heartfelt gift you've received from a child?

Before you answer that, find the "Counting Blessings" heading in Session 1 of your *Mom's Book of Blessing*. [Wait a moment for everyone to find that page.] Here you'll

find the question I just asked along with an additional question to discuss with the other moms at your table. You'll have about 5 minutes to complete this section together.

Time for 5 minutes or a little longer, depending on how animated the table discussions get. You may want to play music softly in the background during this time. Always give a 1-minute warning when moms need to start wrapping up; then after that minute, have them return their attention to you.

I'm guessing you shared some fun stories of your blessings from kids! Let's hear a few of your favorites.

Ask a few women to share with the large group their strangest, funniest, or yuckiest gift they have received from a child. Add glass stones or marbles to your jar for each one.

What Counts as a Blessing?

Those are all great, but let's take a few minutes to think about what a blessing *really* is. You have a common dictionary definition in your book under "What's a Blessing?":

A beneficial thing for which one is grateful; something that brings well-being.

We've just counted a bunch of blessings, but let me ask you a question. Have you ever found it difficult, in the chaos and constant demands of motherhood, to count your blessings?

In the midst of potty-training mishaps, sickness, exhaustion, burnt toast, sibling rivalries, homework battles, and sleep deprivation...are blessings the first things that come to mind?

Let's imagine this common scene: It's the end of a long, hard week, and you're in the grocery check-out line with a full cart and your two normally well-behaved children.

Suddenly, they decide *now's the perfect time* to engage in an all-out battle of wills—complete with wrestling, hitting, screaming, and tears.

What's the first thing that comes to your mind? Probably something like this!

Dump out the vase with the glass stones and laugh.

Don't we sometimes feel like the blessings we've counted into our jars get dumped out? And when our blessing jar is empty, we can feel pretty empty too, can't we? Empty of patience, love, and most likely empty of thankfulness.

Let's talk about what counts as a blessing and how our jars can stay filled up. If blessings can be as unexpected, unusual, strange, funny, and yucky as the ones you've shared, what is it that really makes something a blessing in our lives?

Let's look at a few more definitions of the word *blessing*.

Point out that there are several questions in the "What's a Blessing?" section. Tell moms they'll have 10 minutes to complete the questions in this section with the other moms at their tables. They should stop at the end of this section. You may want to play music softly in the background during this time.



Connecting With God

It's fun to dig into the definitions of the word *blessing* and what it really means when we say we are "blessed." Let's spend some time now digging into what the Bible says about blessing.

Way back in Genesis 12:3, God gave a promise to bless us when he promised

Abraham, "All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

This promise was the foundation for our blessing that was fulfilled by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Galatians 3:9 says, "So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith."

What a wonderful promise! We share the *same blessing* as Abraham—that our families will be blessed! And these blessings are all made possible through Jesus.

Which leads me to another interesting meaning of our English word *blessing*. *Blessing* has its origin in the old English root word *blōd*, meaning "blood." This means the old English word for blessing referred to the act of dedicating something or someone for a special purpose with blood. I admit this sounds a bit odd in our culture today, but that's part of the origin of this word. And if you think about this as a Christian who believes that Jesus Christ died to take the punishment for our sins, it's a pretty cool connection. Every time we say the word *blessing*, we are making reference to the blood Jesus shed so that we could have a relationship with God.

This leads to another possible definition of *blessing*:

The infusion of holiness, spiritual redemption, divine will, or one's hope, or approval.

I don't know about you, but that's the type of blessing I'd love to receive! To be infused with all the holiness, redemption, divine will, and approval God has for me!

There's even more God has to say about blessing, so let's take some time to explore the meaning of *blessing* in the Bible. Under

the “Connecting With God” heading in your book, you’ll find the Bible verses I’ve mentioned so far—plus a few more and discussion questions. Take about 10 minutes to go through that section with the moms at your table.

Give moms 10 to 15 minutes to discuss and share. Play music in the background, and give them a 1-minute warning before having them turn their attention back to you.

Connecting to My Life

Let’s take time for each of us to reflect on the blessings we’ve shared and experienced during our time together today. I’d like you to pick up one of the glass stones on your table. Hold it in your hand and give thanks to God while I read a verse of thanksgiving.

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)

Under the “Connecting to My Life” heading in your book, you’ll find space to jot your thoughts, draw a picture, or capture any words you want to remember from today. I’ll play music softly for about 2 minutes so you’ll have a moment to journal or use this time to pray.

Play instrumental music softly in the background for 2 full minutes. Then lower the volume and turn the music off, signaling that women should return their attention to you.

The notes you make in this book each week will become a great record of the blessings we’ll share. There will be days in between our meetings when you may feel isolated and alone. Use this book to remember the blessings you’ve shared. And if you write

down the contact info of other moms at your table (Hint, hint! Do that!), you’ll have some friends to bless your life during those lonely moments. The additional readings after each lesson are also there for further reflection or an extra boost when you need it!

Closing

As mothers, we need a lot of strength and sometimes (maybe lots of times!) we find ourselves feeling like our blessing jars are dumped out! That’s a perfect time to connect with God and also with the people in our lives who can bless us!

Because—and this is a really important thing for us to remember—blessing is not about giving and receiving *things*. It’s all about giving and receiving *relationship*. It’s through our relationship with God and with each other that we give and receive blessings. And did you know that we have even been given the *job* of blessing each other?

The Message translation of 1 Peter 3:9 says:

“Bless—that’s your job, to bless. You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing.”

Let’s do our job right now! Pair up with another woman in your group, and bless her by giving her your stone and sharing words of encouragement or praying a blessing over her. You can take the stone she gives you with you and start your own blessing jar at home, or keep it as a reminder of how you were blessed today.

Repeat the instructions if needed, and allow women about 3 minutes to complete this.

Now we’ve all been blessed, and we’ve been a blessing to someone else!

Invite the moms to pray with you. Pray for God to bless each mom and infuse them

with all the holiness, redemption, divine will, and approval God has for them. Pray blessing for their families, especially if they are going through difficult times. Thank God for his unfailing love and his promise to bless us, and ask him to also help us be blessings to one another. Pray for the women to be blessed by their relationships at Where Moms Connect and give thanks to God for all the blessings counted today and for all that are to be counted in the months ahead!

Then read this passage from Numbers 6:24-26 (known as the priestly blessing) as an ending to your prayer:

"May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace."

Thank women for coming, and let them know how much time those who have children in child care have before they need to collect their kids, or remind moms of any announcements that were made at the beginning of your time together.

