

## **The Power of Blessing**

We spent the past few weeks talking about the power of praise. As I reflected on the importance of praising the Lord, I thought about the importance of praising others in our life – spouse, children, parents, friends, employees, co-workers. We bless the Lord with our words, our praise, and as we explained that is part of our purpose, our reason for being. But we also have an opportunity and a responsibility to praise and bless those God has placed in our life and in our path, especially those closest to us, our family.

In the Old Testament, one generation would tell the goodness of God to the next. But we also find one generation speaking blessing over the next. Often nearing the end of his life the Patriarch of the family would call in his children and grandchildren and remind them of God's dealings with the family in the past. He would place his hands on them and prophecy concerning the child's future. He would link the past to the future, declaring the God given destiny of the children and grandchildren. They would pronounce blessing on their offspring before they died.

It sounded neat and orderly, but it doesn't always happen that way. We aren't always given the opportunity to pronounce an end of life blessing. We don't speak with prophetic authority the way the biblical patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac or Jacob did. They spoke with a spiritual authority, imparting blessings. For us, spiritual blessing is tied to knowing Jesus and serving him rather than who our biological father or mother is or was. But there is a way to bless our loved ones. We don't have to wait until the end of our life. In fact, I believe God would prefer that we do it now, to share words of praise and blessing with others. Rather than a one time occurrence, I'm suggesting it should be a way of life. I'm not merely suggesting we complement one another with casual praise. I'm suggesting something deeper than that. I'm talking about bestowing a blessing. Let me explain what I mean.

In bestowing a blessing, we are communicating a sense of love and acceptance, we are ascribing value and worth to that person. We are keeping before them the knowledge that God has a plan and purpose for their life, we are imparting to them a sense of destiny, a sense of purpose in God's kingdom and in God's economy. We are declaring to children, spouse, friends, whomever, that they are God's children, they belong to him and not to the devil or to the world.

So many people look for acceptance, look for affirmation they never received from parents. Perhaps they grew up without a father in the house or without a mother. Longing for a blessing, they end up looking in the wrong places, looking to the wrong people. We've failed to

recognize the importance and the power, the significance of blessing our family, our children. We've failed to recognize the power of our words to effect someone's future, their destiny.

Look at this story in Genesis 27. It points out the power of a blessing bestowed and of a blessing denied. **“When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, ‘My son.’ ‘Here I am,’ he answered. Isaac said, ‘I am an old man and don’t know the day of my death. Now then, get your weapons – your quiver and bow- and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.” Genesis 27:1-4**

Just a little background. Isaac was Abraham's son by Sarah, his wife. Abraham had another son, Ishmael, the son of a servant, but Isaac was the chosen son, the son God promised, the son that received the blessing. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah and they were unable to have children. He prayed and when he was 60 his wife gave birth to twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was born first but Jacob was born grasping his brother's heel. Jacob was always trying to get something that didn't belong to him. So when it came time for Esau to receive his father's blessing, Jacob plotted with his mother, Rebekah, to trick his father and get his father's blessing, the blessing reserved for the eldest son.

There was a generous amount of dysfunction going on in this household as you can see. Perhaps it was because of what the Lord had said to Rebekah when she was pregnant with the twins, that the older would serve the younger, that she decided to help Jacob deceive his father. Maybe she just liked Jacob better. He was a momma's boy and Esau was a daddy's boy. Regardless, she hatches a scheme for Jacob to receive the blessing. (Read Genesis 27:5-29).

We don't know how Jacob managed to deceive his father. Not only was Isaac's eye sight failing, but perhaps his sense of reason was failing too. Jacob takes advantage of his 100 year old father's vulnerability. Notice that Isaac says, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not...Come here, my son, and kiss me...” After he kissed him, Isaac blessed him, speaking of financial blessing, dominance over nations and over the rest of the family including Esau's descendants.

Remember again, the blessing carried a spiritual and prophetic authority. Jacob has now received this blessing, even if by trickery, and for this family in this culture it was binding. The truth is there for all of us to see, even apart from the spiritual and prophetic authority: The power of the spoken word. Once something is said, it can't be unsaid. The blessing had been given.

Look at verse 30. **“After Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, ‘My father, sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.’” Genesis 27:30-31** Isaac asks, “Who are you?” “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.” **“Isaac trembled violently and said, ‘Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!’” Genesis 27:33**

The blessing had been given and it could not be retracted. The fact was, even through and in spite of the deception involved, God was working his will for Jacob and for Esau. The blessing would come to Jacob, although he would experience his share of trouble and brokenness before he could experience the blessing. We can see the power of the blessing bestowed, but notice in Esau the pain of the blessing withheld. The bible says, **“When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me – me too my father!’” But he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing,’ ..Esau said... ‘Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?...Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!’ Then Esau wept aloud.” Genesis 27:34-38**

It’s a sad story in so many ways. The betrayal and deception of family members. I’m thinking jealousy and envy was part of the family dynamic for a lot of years but we aren’t going to explore that part of the story. You can hear and feel part of the anguish of Esau. Perhaps some can relate to that feeling, of longing for words of blessing from a father or a mother or a teacher but the words of blessing or praise never came. Blessings came to other family members but not to you. Whether deserved or undeserved, the pain is real. The desire and need for a blessing is real. The reason is because there is power in blessing.

Perhaps you have been one that has withheld blessing from family members or friends. For the first time you start to realize the pain you’ve caused by withholding the blessing. Do you have only one blessing to give? It’s not too late to change and begin bestowing blessings on those you love. Let’s look a little deeper into how we bestow blessing!

More than 30 years ago Gary Smalley and John Trent authored a book entitled *The Blessing*. I actually hadn’t thought of it in years, but I pulled it out to review what they said for this sermon. They refer to five essential elements of the blessing, elements we see in this story in Genesis 27 and in other examples of Old Testament saints bestowing blessing on their family. They say, **“The family blessing includes: meaningful touch, a spoken message, attaching**

**high value to the one being blessed, picturing a special future for the one being blessed, an active commitment to fulfill the blessing.” ...Smalley and Trent** I want us to consider these five elements of blessing over the next couple of weeks.

**Bestowing blessing through meaningful touch.** We live in a culture and society where inappropriate touch and unwanted touch is too often in the headlines. Meaningful touch is defined as a gentle touch, stroke, kiss or hug given by a significant person in your life – a spouse, parent, child or close friend. I’m talking about appropriate, meaningful touch between loving, caring friends and family. I’m not talking about random hugs or touching from creepy people you don’t know, or unwanted touches. Again, I’m talking about meaningful touch from significant people in your life.

The social sciences have studied the value and importance of meaningful touch. Infants require being held, touched in order to be physically and emotionally healthy. I recall reading a study about infants in an Eastern European orphanage that were not picked up and held frequently. The survival rate diminished. There were lasting emotional and intellectual deficits. Infants that are not held fail to thrive. One university study indicated men and women need 8 to 10 meaningful touches per day. One study indicated if type A, driven men would hug their wives several times a day it increases their life span by almost 2 years. Men, hug your wife!

Dads and moms, hug your children. I watched Brian hug Crosby Friday night with a kiss on the head. Meaningful touch. I know your 14 year old probably doesn’t want to be hugged or kissed by mom or dad as they arrive at school, but they need to know they are loved and accepted and affirmed through appropriate and meaningful touch. You’ll find the right time with your son or daughter. Spouses, hold hands and hug one another. It’s harder to grow apart when you share a meaningful touch. Among friends or other significant relationships, how about a high five or a pat on the back, a gentle touch on the arm or a reassuring pat on the hand? Smalley and Trent write that appropriate, meaningful touch “is a key to communicating warmth, personal acceptance, affirmation – even physical health.”

Just a tip, read people’s body language. I’m not talking about hugging and touching people you don’t know. Meaningful touch means you know the person. Not everyone wants to be hugged. Unwanted touches can qualify as battery at worst, creepy at best. A simple touch on the arm, hand, a pat on the back. Know the person and know the signs that someone welcomes that interaction and touch.

Isaac thought he was calling to Esau, but he called him to come close, so he could touch or hold his hand. He embraced his grown son. Jacob kissed his elderly father. Jacob would eventually bless his children and he laid his hand on the head of Joseph's sons, his grandsons and blessed them. Mark says **“Jesus took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.” Mark 10:16** Jesus touched the lepers and the outcast and the untouchable of his society. Imagine, after years of being avoided, untouched, and Jesus touched them and his touch made them clean and whole. We have people everywhere, adults and students that only know an abusive touch or an inappropriate touch. Nursing homes are filled with people that could use a caring, loving touch, a pat on the hand. Loving, appropriate, meaningful touch. It is part of the way you can bless your children, your family, those significant people in your life.

**Bestowing blessing through spoken words.** Words have incredible power to build up or tear down, particularly when those words come from a family member or a person of significance in your life. Abraham spoke a blessing to Isaac, Isaac spoke a blessing to Jacob, Jacob spoke a blessing to his 12 sons and his 2 grandsons. Our words also carry blessing. They can either praise and bless or they can curse and destroy.

James said in his letter, **“The tongue is a small part of the body but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body, it corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire...With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.” James 3:5-10**

As parents your words can set and direct the course of your child's life for good or for bad, for success or failure. Sociologists talk about self-fulfilling prophecy. You speak words to and about and over your child and they grow up believing what they've heard about themselves. If a child lives with constant insult and belittlement, always told how bad they are, how they will never accomplish anything, how they fail to measure up, that parent has set a course for that child's life and as James said, you have set the course of their life on fire! You've limited their outlook, their potential, their future.

Stop and think about the words you are saying to children, to your spouse, to your family and friends. Do they know the intent behind it? Is your spoken word communicating God's blessing or is it insulting, belittling? Are you limiting their future or are you empowering them

and enabling them to soar to greater heights and accomplishments? You can bestow the blessing of an unlimited future. (CAVU - Ceiling and visibility unlimited.)

The bible says, **“When you speak, make sure it’s always full of grace, and well flavored with salt! That way you’ll know how to give each person an appropriate answer.”** **Colossians 4:6.** Salt is a preservative that flavors food. Are you speaking words full of grace and favor? Is your conversation flavored with something helpful, with blessing? What course are you setting for your children? For your spouse and your marriage?

Are you communicating at all with your children? “Well, they know I love them.” Do they? Your children need to know today that they are loved and valued. It may sound silly, but do it anyway. Your silence will communicate more of a message than you might think. Don’t leave room for doubt. Tell them! This might be your last chance to tell someone you love them, you care about them, you appreciate them. Praise them. Bless them.

**“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow I will give it when you have it with you.”** **Proverbs 3:27-28** You have the power with your spoken words to bless someone, to affirm someone, to encourage someone you know and love. Don’t withhold praise. Don’t withhold affirmation and encouragement and commendation. Let them know. Speak to them. Proverbs 18 says, **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”** **Proverbs 18:21** Speak life while you can!

I’m not just suggesting you talk more to your kids or your spouse or parents or friends, do that, but bless them when you talk with them. **Recognize that your words are having an effect. Make it a blessed effect. Make it a positive effect, a godly effect, a grace filled effect!**

You may have come from a family where you just didn’t hug or touch or talk much. No one ever said they loved each other. It was assumed, implied. “Of course I loved you, I got up and went to work everyday to put food on the table didn’t I?” Yes, that’s real good, but I’m suggesting that might not be enough. Speak. Bless your family. Bless your friends. Speak words of life and affirmation and blessing. Tell Dad you love him. Tell your Mom you love her. Shock your brother and write him a letter and say, “thanks Wally for not being too much of a jerk when we were growing up.”

We have more to cover next week, but I want to bless you and then I want us to bless one another. The bible says, **“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:**

**The Lord bless you and keep you;**

**the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;**

**the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Numbers 6:22-26**

Repeat this together. Look at your neighbor and say it.

**“So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them.” Numbers 6:27**

When we bless one another, we put the name of the Lord on each other. We speak of his nature, his character, we are reflecting, projecting his grace and mercy and blessing over one another.

Perhaps you’ve lived without the blessing you’ve longed for from a parent or spouse or family member or friend. Maybe you’ve felt lonely and alone. But today, the blessing of the Lord is upon you. Maybe you’ve been guilty of withholding the blessing from others, but today you see the importance and the power of blessing others. It’s not too late to begin blessing others. You can make a difference in someone’s life.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace!