

Blessing Sermon 8/23/2020

Intro of Esther: 2 weeks ago I preached on the use of our words through “**encouragement**” of others. And I challenged us to intentionally think about someone each and every day to try to encourage. Part way through the week I received an email from Esther Banian who has been attending Knollwood for about 3 years and many of you have know. She’d been giving this encouragement challenge some careful thought and sent me the following text message.

We both got a laugh out of it. But Esther did more than that, she actually recorded it. So, I’d like to play it for you right now. Play Esther video. I love that...thank you Esther.

Encouragement is using our words to **breathe courage into someone else**. To strengthen them with words that give them that extra boost to continue on with something or life itself.

Last week I preached on a concept called “**affirmation**”. And that practice involves **recognizing a God given quality or God’s transformational work in someone**. And by affirming them in this way, they are given strength to continue on and God is glorified.

Today I want to explore the idea of ‘**blessing**’. We began the service today listening to the powerful song, “**The Blessing**” which talks about how God has promised to bless us and our future generations. Most of the words of the song are taken from God’s instructions to the priests on what to constantly say to His people. And God tells them to say: “*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*” (Numbers 6:22-23)

The very first time we see God speaking a blessing is over the animal kingdom. The way he blesses them is by giving them instructions on how to live: **Genesis 1:22 (NIV)** *God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.”*

The next day God created the rest of the animal kingdom and man and he gave man a very similar blessing: **Genesis 1:28 (NIV)** *God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

We see from these first two examples that a blessing often involves giving someone a clear direction or purpose for their lives. A blessing can also involve bestowing favor upon someone else, but quite often it carries the deeper sense of a giving someone a sense of purpose of direction for their lives.

Another significant piece of being blessed by God is that we might then become a blessing to others. We see that very early on when God choses Abraham to become the father of His people. It describes God’s encounter with Abraham this way: “The Lord had said to Abram, “*Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will **bless you**; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**”* Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)

That same reciprocal blessing is carried over to us as well. We are intended to be a blessing to others as God’s blessing flows to and through us. **I’ll return to that concept more in just a moment.**

We see throughout the Old Testament that this concept of blessing was **very important in that culture**. You really see that in the example of **Jacob stealing his older brother’s blessing** by tricking his dad into thinking he was actually his much hairier brother. It’s kind of a funny story, although quite sad for **Esau**. For when he comes in to receive his father’s blessing and realizes what his younger brother has done, he weeps bitterly.

In the story, Esau plots to kill his younger brother, but their mom hears of the plot and quickly gets Jacob out of town and harms way.

Many years later, Jacob is timidly returning to hopefully make up with his brother. And the night before he is to meet him, Jacob is curiously all by himself when an angel appears to him. And this is another very strange encounter. Jacob ends up wrestling with this angel all night to a stalemate. When I was in college I once saw a friend of mine **wrestle a bear to a stalemate**. That was pretty amazing, but to wrestle an angel to a stalemate would be way more amazing. At the end of their match Jacob had a really good hold on the angel and wouldn't let me go until the angel **blessed him**. One of the ways the angel blessed him was by changing his name from **Jacob to Israel** (which means *you have struggled with God and man and have prevailed*). It was clearly given at that moment to give Jacob confidence in meeting up with his older brother the next day. But also confidence through the rest of his life and allows him to live up to the blessing his father had given him earlier.

The very first words of the Psalms are "**Blessed are**"
Jesus began his most famous sermon with: "**Blessed are the poor in spirit**"

This concept of "blessing" isn't as prevalent today as it was back in the Jewish culture of Jesus' day. In the **Jewish Talmud**, which are instructions on how to live life, it states that a person is obligated to recite 100 blessings every day. That would cause you to live every day **aware of God's involvement in your life** and would naturally result in you being **a more grateful person**.

Perhaps it would be good to adopt this practice in our lives. And there's good Scriptural reason to live like this. Remember God's promise to Abraham: that He would richly bless Abraham so that he could be a blessing to others? We have that same promise carried over to us as well, through Jesus.

Galatians 3:13-14 (NIV) *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.* When Christ hung on that cross, he took our sin curse and exchanged it for God's blessings, which are on us, lives within us and should flow through us to others.

Also, look at the power of Paul's claim in Ephesians 1:3 (NIV) *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

That claims that every single follower of Christ has been richly blessed by God. You could spend a lot of time recording all of the ways we've been blessed by God. For instance, in the **next 10 verses Paul lists 10 specific ways that we've each been blessed abundantly**.

So, what does it mean to bless someone? The original Greek and Hebrew words provide interesting insight here.

Hebrew: the root word for bless is "**barak**" which means **to kneel**. (Brian kneel) What happens when you kneel? You demonstrate humility. You also demonstrate that this person matters to you because while you're kneeling you're staying in that moment. You're not running around going a million other things. You're saying: "I'm right here, right now, with YOU!!"

Greek: the Greek word for blessing is **eulogeo**, which means to **speak well of**. It's where we get our word **eulogy** which is the time in a funeral service where people get up and talk about how wonderful this person was. But the Biblical concept of blessing goes beyond just merely saying nice things about a person. A biblical blessing is **declaring God's truth or promises into a person and thereby giving them hope for their future**.

One person defined blessing simply as "**declaring what God intends to happen in that person's life.**" Your words of blessing don't contain magic power but when we speak things that are in alignment with God's promises in His Word, we are applying God's truths to a specific person's life and situations.

Obviously to be effective in this you need to key elements:

1. Spend time in God's Word knowing His truths and promises
2. Be in tune to the leading of the Holy Spirit for a person's life

Let me give you a couple of examples of how this might work.

1. Imagine that you know a person who struggles with **fear** and **anxiety**. You could use a concordance to look for verses that refer to "**fear**" and "**anxiety**" and "**peace**" and "**comfort**". As you search you'd find

2 Timothy 1:7 "*God did not give us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*"

And **1 John 4:18** "*There is not fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.*" And based on **Numbers 6:24-26** you could create this blessing: "*May the Lord God bless you and keep you from the rush of fear and anxiety. May He cause His face to shine upon you with His power and love, and may He give you a sound mind. Through His perfect love, may God give you grace to cast out fear. May He lift up His countenance upon you with freedom as you tell Him every detail of your need in earnest, thankful prayer, and may He give you His peace that surpasses all understanding as He keep your heart and mind safe through Jesus Christ.*"

2. **For someone in deep sorrow** refer to **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

So you may write and declare for them: *May God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort, encourage your heart and protect you from despair. May He cause His face to shine upon you as you rejoice in the midst of troubles and trials, putting your faith in Him and being confident of His lovingkindness toward you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you with the riches of His joy and pleasure, and may He give you His peace in your heart and soul.*

3. **For someone feeling defeated by life** you may run across Romans 8:37 *in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* And the reason we can be more than conquerors is because nothing can separate us from God's love. And so you can declare for this individual: "*Father, thank you that you have made _____ more than a conqueror. Not because of anything he's done, but because of Christ's death on the cross. Jesus, you defeated the Great Accuser – Satan Himself when you died for Joe's sins. And through his acceptance of You, he's locked into your love and protection. Nothing can come between you and Him. Thank you that he can live confidently every day knowing that you've got Him and will keep Him until the day you come back and take him to live forever with you.*"

Peter left us a great model blessing that he wrote to Christians who were undergoing persecution.

1 Peter 5:10-11 (NIV) *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

I've also put together a 3-sheet handout with many of these you could use. And add your own.

As you speak these words in prayer or speak them directly to the person for whom they are written, you will invoke the power, grace, and blessing of God upon them. You could also write it out and text it or put it in a card and send it to them. That way they can read it over and over.

God has richly blessed you and wants to use each of you to be a blessing to others.

So, take the time this week to practice either, **encouragement**, **affirmation** or **blessing** into someone's life.

This **Thursday night from 4-5pm**, I want to invite you to stop by the church for a time of fellowship and I'm going to have a bunch of cards that you could write a note of encouragement, affirmation or blessing to someone. We'll be meeting in the lower level of the church where we can easily practice social distancing and still see and talk with each other. I know I miss seeing many of you.