
Surprise the World! Chapter 3: Bless

I will bless three people this week—at least one of whom is not a member of our church.

Scripture

³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* —Philippians 2:3-4, NIV

¹⁴ *If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.* —Proverbs 27:14, NIV

Chapter Summary

“To bless” has a variety of meanings.

1. It comes from Old English/Germanic words originally meaning “to hallow by the sprinkling of blood on pagan altars.”
2. The Greek word which it is used for in the New Testament means “to speak well of; to praise.”
3. Most Christians today use the word to speak of conferring prosperity, good health, or happiness on someone else.
4. Some say it means “to add strength to someone’s arm.”
5. Blessing God is a concept which comes from the Old Testament word which means “to bend the knee, worship, praise, invoke blessings.”

There are three primary ways to bless someone.

First, **words of affirmation.** A note, a card, an email, a text, a kind word. Words of affirmation require empathy.

“Encouragement requires empathy and seeing the world from [another’s] perspective. We must first learn what is important to [the other]. Only then can we give encouragement. With verbal encouragement, we are trying to communicate, ‘I know. I care. I am with you. How can I help?’ We are trying to show that we believe in [the person] and in [his or her] abilities. We are giving credit and praise.”
—Gary Chapman, quoted on Pages 31-32

Second, **acts of kindness.** These can be anything from babysitting, mowing a lawn, helping a neighbor move, anything which helps lighten someone’s load. In Alcoholics Anonymous, one promise is, “I will do somebody a good turn and will not get found out. If anybody knows of it, it will not count.”

Third, **gifts.** The author mentions random gift giving (a very intentional act on your part, but random because it is unexpected). Some gifts fit a known need, and others are expressions of your kindness, regardless of the need.

He cites a study of teams of short-term missionaries to Thailand, one who went with a blessing strategy and the other with a conversion strategy. The blessers had almost 50 times as many conversions as the converters.

Three cautions about blessing others:

“First, while blessing others will certainly provide opportunities to share your faith with them, we need to be watchful that we’re not being generous friends *merely* in order to convert them.”
—Pages 35-36

Second, the recipient must feel blessed. Blessing in order to receive something in return will ruin the blessing. This is where Philippians 2:3-4 and Proverbs 27:14 are good to tuck away. We blessers must become students of

those we bless, not making the same mistake as some missionaries of the past who brought more of their culture with them than was needed.

“When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible.”
—Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, quoted on Pages 37-38

Third, people may still question our motives or hate us for our faith, as we find in 1 Peter 3:15-16 and Matthew 5:11. We can still keep a clear conscience and operate with motives based in humility, gentleness, and generosity.

Questions

Use whichever questions you like. Some are taken from the book; other questions can be found starting on page 109.

1. The author applies Philippians 2:3-4 to our motives and behavior in blessing others. How do these verses add boundaries to your blessing efforts?
2. Proverbs 27:14 advises us that blessings can be viewed as curses. Has this ever happened to you (either as the one giving or the one receiving)?
3. Who has added strength to your arm or been an encouragement to you?
4. Which type of blessing above is the most natural and comfortable to you? Which would you like to be more intentional about in the weeks ahead?
5. How can you become a better student of the people you bless?
6. How do you persevere in blessing others when they misunderstand your motives or reject you/your faith?
7. How does it feel when someone is giving you a gift only to get something from you? How does this gesture impact your response to the gift?
8. One of the principles of the kingdom of God is asking rather than “casting our pearls before swine,” by which Jesus meant giving people the good things we have when they aren’t ready for them in order to (actively or passively) coerce them into doing what we want (in this case, become a disciple). What are the good things you wish you could communicate or “give” to a non-Christian friend, but they aren’t ready to receive them?
9. Charles Spurgeon once said, “Prayer is always the preface to blessing. It goes before the blessing as the blessing’s shadow.” How might God have you pray before and after blessing someone else?

Prayer

While our tendency is to pray, “Lord, send me three people to bless,” or “Show me how I can bless someone,” let’s pray a prayer of blessing over one another. Pair up in your group or class and pray a blessing over your partner.

Challenge

Bless three people this week: One from our church, one not from our church, and a third person.

