HOW TO BLESS OTHERS by David Diestelkamp

Biblical blessing generally takes three forms: people are blessed by God (Ex: Nu 6:24-26), God is blessed by people (Ex: Lk 1:68), and people are blessed by people (Ex: Lk 6:28). Let’s look at that last one. When is the last time you blessed another person? Maybe you said, “God bless you” when someone sneezed or “Bless their heart” when you mentioned something unflattering about someone, but these don’t really meet the biblical standard for blessing. We know we’re supposed to bless others, but how do we do it?

The word *bless* can have several related meanings based on biblical usage:

**To give thanks:** In the feeding of the five thousand, Luke 9:16 says that Jesus blessed the loaves and fish. John 6:11 says that He gave thanks for them because it can have the same meaning (compare Mt 26:26 and Lk 22:19).

**To say something good:** “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Ro 12:14; 1 Co 4:12). Blessing is the opposite of cursing (saying something bad to or wishing ill upon someone). It is actually translated “praise” in some places (Ex: Lk 1:64).

**To give something good:** God has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ep 1:3). Being blessed is to receive something good. Blessing someone is giving them something good.

**To express the wish for something good for others:** Boaz greeted his harvesters with, “The Lord be with you!” and they responded, “The Lord bless you!” (Ru 2:4). Blessing tells someone that you want good things to happen to them. You want God to give someone what is good.

Peter reminds us that we are called to bless, even when others do evil and insult us. The temptation is to “repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling” (1 Pe 3:9 ESV), but we must resist and bless. However, there is another, more insidious way of failing our call to bless others: doing or saying nothing. In refraining to curse and do evil to others, we still haven’t given them a blessing. We withhold something negative without supplying something positive.

In every situation we need to be looking for ways to bless others. We’ll need to intentionally look for ways because it won’t always be obvious or feel natural. We need to ask ourselves if there is something for which we can give thanks and then do it. That’s blessing. We need to look past the evil of others and do or say something good. That’s blessing. We can give good things that are needed even to the ungrateful and undeserving. That’s blessing. And, in the most challenging situations, we can still express our desire that others will receive good from God (even when they reject it from us). That’s blessing.

This is what we see in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:44: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” We love and bless those who oppose us by doing good to them and praying for them. Notice that this has more to do with our hearts and attitudes and less to do with who others are or what they do.

Blessing others is about changing our hearts to be like God’s heart. Jesus said that loving our enemies and blessing those who curse us makes us “sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust” (Mt 5:45). He went on to say that only loving and blessing those who love and bless us is no better than what sinners do. It doesn’t feel great to bless those who curse us. It’s hard. It requires self-control, thoughtfulness, and looking at things spiritually rather than just physically. But isn’t that what being “sons of your Father in heaven” (and not sons and daughters of this world) is really about?

Christians have two powerful motivations to bless others. First, God richly blesses the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45). As His children, we will exhibit this family trait, following His example (1 Pe 2:23). James reminds us that we must not “bless God” and curse men who have been made in God’s likeness (Ja 3:9). Our primary motivations are being Christ-like and knowing that other’s are made in the image of God. Second, we are called to bless in all situations and, in doing so, we are inheriting a blessing (1 Pe 3:9). Our eternal blessing is so great that it motivates us to bless all others—worthy or unworthy—since sharing this blessing only increases it, no matter how others respond. We bless and desire that God bless others because we are so blessed in Christ.

Romans 12:9 contains an important warning: “Let love be without hypocrisy…” God is not prescribing an empty, trite response so we can say we gave a blessing to others. Our love for others must be “genuine” (ESV), and “sincere” (NIV). No matter what we do or say, it’s not love if we don’t mean it. It’s not blessing if we don’t want them to be blessed or if it is a passive aggressive attempt to manipulate them. And we must not bless them to their face but curse them behind their backs. Don’t wish them God’s blessing in public but privately hope that God curses them.

“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way…” (2 Co 9:11). We are blessed to bless.

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