

Surprise The World

Week 2 ~ Chapter 3: Bless

“*Blessed to be a blessing.*” This was/is a popular slogan or tagline in Church and Christian circles. While it’s not an exact quote from Scripture, it is an idea that is quite consistent with the Biblical story. God’s people are blessed in order to be a blessing to those around them. As we do so, God is glorified and we are a signpost to the reality of God at work all around us. Jesus expressed this same idea/sentiment in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, “*...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16), the presumption being that such “good deeds” are a blessing to somebody.

Michael Frost defines/describes “to bless” as to speak well of people; praise or encourage people; or to add strength to people...by relieving a burden, lifting the spirit, or alleviating distress.

Frost specifically mentions three ways we can bless others...

- Words of affirmation
- Acts of kindness
- Gifts

All three of these require that we be students of people, to observe them, pay attention to them, and notice what’s going on in their lives. All three of these are ways to communicate to people that we see them, we know, we care, we’re thinking of them, we value them.

One thing Frost doesn’t really mention that I think is worth noting is that one of the best ways for us to be motivated to bless others is by regularly taking the time to remind ourselves of how blessed we are, how much God has showered His blessing upon us. As we “count our blessings”, so to speak, it tends to cultivate an impulse to bless others.

Connecting this chapter both to last week’s conversation about habits as well as our overall theme for the year of Becoming, we could say: We want to BECOME the type of people who regularly and naturally bless others.

Why do we want to BECOME such people? First and foremost, it mirrors the character of God. As Christians, as God’s Beloved Children, as bearers of His image and name, we want to be like Him. He blesses, so we bless. Second, it fosters a spirit of generosity in us. Again, God is generous, so we can and should be generous. Third, as we reflect God’s activity in the world, it alerts others to God’s activity and reign. If our regular prayer is, “*Thy kingdom (reign) come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” then a regular practice of blessing others seems in order.

The author offers a few cautions we need to be aware of. First, we don’t bless with ulterior motives. While we may have a hoped for response (open doors for conversation, or turning people’s attention to God), ultimately we bless simply because we are called to bless...a simple

act of love that will be received as such. We leave any “fruit” or “results” to God. If anything, the “goal” (if we must have one) is, again, that we BECOME people whose natural rhythm of life includes blessing those around us, resembling our Heavenly Father.

Second, it is important that the recipient feel blessed. Have you ever received a gift because someone really wanted you to have something that you didn’t really want? Probably didn’t feel like a “blessing” did it? Good intentions are nice, but as Frost mentions, let’s be good students of those we intend to bless.

Third, don’t be offended if people misjudge our motives/intentions, or don’t want to receive/accept our blessing. Personally, I think that when people are skeptical or suspicious of us it’s actually an opportunity to “surprise” them by not being easily offended. We currently live in a world that’s easily offended by any and every thing. Some people, it seems, consider it a virtue to be easily offended. It would do us well to remember the words of Paul, “*Love is not easily angered/offended.*” (I Corinthians 13:5)

I’m going to add another caution. The flipside of an ulterior motive might be a justification/rationalization to not bless someone. Perhaps there’s some resentment, bitterness, or annoyance you have toward someone. Maybe blessing them might be exactly what’s needed to soften your heart. Remember, we don’t bless others based on whether they “deserve” it or not...just as (thankfully) God doesn’t bless us based on whether we deserve it or not.

Possible Discussion Questions

- Of the three forms of blessing/encouragement mentioned in this chapter (words of affirmation; acts of kindness; gifts) which means the most to you to receive?
- Take a minute or two and jot down some people in your life who you could bless? If you’re willing to share, why them? How might you bless them this week? (This is actually a little pre-work for the soul training exercise 😊)
- Who do you know that could use an encouraging/affirming word? What might that look like?
- Who can you think of that could use an act of kindness or practical help? What might that look like?
- Who is someone you could bless with a “just because” gift?
- Describe a time when you were blessed by someone, perhaps by words of affirmation or an act of kindness or a gift. (Who did it come from? What did you feel/experience from it?)

- Would you consider yourself a “student” of people...i.e. Do you intentionally observe and pay attention to others, so that you know how to engage/interact with them? Perhaps offer an example.
- Describe a time when you felt someone had an ulterior motive for “blessing” you? How can you ensure that you don’t operate from an ulterior motive?
- Honestly, is there anyone you’d rather not bless...someone you’re avoiding?
- As you consider the “assignment” this week of blessing 3 people—at least one person who is not from your church; one who is a part of your church—how does it make you feel? What’s your attitude going into it? And why do you think you feel as you do?
- Who was the last “new friend” you have made? How did that come about/develop? What sort of distinction do you make between “acquaintances” and “friends”?

(***Discussion Leaders: as a reminder, the goal is NOT to get through all these questions. Rather, pick a few that you think will generate good conversation with your group. Or, allow them to simply be fodder for you to come up with other questions for your group. Also, there are some questions in the back of the book for you to peruse as well. May your conversations be rich, deep, meaningful, and stimulating.***)

Soul Training Exercise ~(This week’s exercise is a three-parter)

First, on a daily basis “count your blessings” and thank God for them. This will help give the fuel/motivation for the second exercise...

Obviously, the second one is what the author proposes: Bless 3 people this week—in some way, shape, or form. Try to make one of them not a member of the church; one a member of the church; and whatever you prefer as the third. (Though feel free to go beyond 3 if you feel so moved.) As you consider who you might bless, pay attention to any resistance you might feel about blessing a particular person. That resistance might be a signal that’s exactly who you should bless...someone we might otherwise avoid.

Third, try to commit 1 Peter 3:15 to memory...

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

The reason I added this third option/invitation is due largely to the influence of Dallas Willard (who you likely know is a big influence on me). Regarding Scripture memorization he said, *“Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs.”*