

Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Peter 2:1-10

“7 Desires of the Heart: To Be Blessed”

Do you ever think, “If people only knew – if my secrets were ever made public, I’m not sure what I’d do!”

Our secrets exposed? A lot of people would want to run and hide!

Max Lucado wrote: It’s time to let God’s love cover all things in your life. All the secrets. All the hurts. The mornings you woke up in the bed of a stranger? His love will cover that. The years you peddled prejudice and pride? His love will cover that. Every promise broken, every drug taken, and every penny stolen. Every cross word, every cuss word, and every harsh word. His love covers all things!¹

Let’s not confuse God’s love with the love we find in the world. Our love for one another often increases with *performance* and decreases with disappointments. Not so with God’s love. He loves you right where you are. If you think God’s love for you would be stronger if your faith were stronger, you’re wrong! If you think His love would be deeper if your thoughts were deeper and more pure and holy, you’re wrong again.

Though we spurn Him, ignore Him, reject Him, despise and disobey Him, God will not change in His desire for you! **God proves His love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.** (Romans 5:8) So your evil cannot diminish His love. But your goodness can’t increase His love, either! Your faith doesn’t earn God’s love anymore than your foolishness or stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn’t love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God’s love is constant and never ceasing.

The Bible tells us that God **lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along.** (Psalm 40:2)

Has God ever lifted you? Have you ever experienced God’s unconditional love becoming unmistakably real?

Thomas Merton, one of the 20th century’s great Christian believers, wrote “A saint is not someone who is good. It is someone who has experienced the goodness of God.” Going along with Merton’s thought, saints are those who have come to know deep, abiding grace. Saints understand that their failures and shortcomings do not disqualify them from receiving God’s love. Saints have learned that their gross, self-inflicted wounds – rather than alienating God – bring the presence and power of God to bear on their lives in unique and powerful ways.

We are making our way through the **7 Desires of Every Heart**. First we looked at the desire to be heard and understood. Last week, it was the desire to be affirmed. And today, the desire **to be blessed**. And we need to understand a careful difference between being affirmed (the need we defined last week) and being blessed. *Listen*: While an affirmation is about what we *do*, blessings are about *who you are*.

A *blessing* happens when someone lets you know that you are a very special person in their life. They love you, they are proud of you, and they want to be with you. When we are blessed, it’s not because we did anything; we are loved for just being who we are. Being blessed brings a feeling of comfort and security!

Isn’t the love of God a blessing for *us*? God’s love is not like a thermometer that goes up

¹ Max Lucado

and down! I don't know how we got this idea that God withholds His love from us when we mess up! But I think it's because we were not always loved well by the people on which we were depending.

A blessing happens when someone lets you know that you are a very special person in their life. Now take a minute to think about your parents, maybe your mothers especially. Parents should be the primary and first source of blessing. Were they the kind of people who blessed you? Did they let you know how special you are to them?

And to parents who are here today: Is there anything your child could do to stop you from loving them? Sometimes they make awful decisions and do painful things, but a parent's love is timeless!

Let's take this contrast between the desire for affirmation and the desire for blessing a step further. When we don't receive affirmations – and affirmation comes from what we've done – we can feel *guilty about the things we do*. When we don't receive a blessing – and blessings come for who we are – we can feel *shameful about who we are*. Guilt is the awareness that *I made* a mistake. Shame is the feeling that *I am* a mistake. Shame tells me that I am worthless, that no one loves me as I am, so I go through life beating myself up and putting myself down.

For some, *shame* can feel like a permanent nametag on your chest. Hello, I'm Unworthy. I'm Disgraceful. I'm Unacceptable.

Ever since Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, the third chapter of the Bible, we have struggled to embrace God's truth: that we are loved and wanted by God! Instead, we have conformed to lies defined by what *shame* says about us. (Drs. Clinton and Laaser) In the book, *The Fight of Your Life*, shame is defined as “the inability to accept yourself and be comfortable in your own skin; the fear that you will somehow be ‘revealed and seen’ for who you are, and then no longer be accepted and loved...”

Several years ago, a young man serving a church, a friend of mine, had a secret that came to light. Because the secret was exposed, my friend had to confess something that was embarrassing and shameful, forcing him to step down from his position as a pastor.

Everyone was shocked by the news. Those who knew him couldn't believe what was revealed, and I know he felt great shame! So much so, that in order to attend worship at a church, he considered going across the state line where no one would know him. The next week I called him and we visited over lunch. I told him I wanted him to come to church where I was serving.

Two things I knew: a) Shame can drive people over the edge, even to choose to hurt themselves in order to hide from shame. b) The second thing I knew was that God redeems people “from out of the pit, and lifts us out of the mud and mire to set our feet on solid ground again, steadying them as they walk along.” I believed that my buddy should experience the mercy and love of God through His Church, and I wanted to be in on that! Don't you? He was the same man I had known for years. Now I knew something else about him, but I know any of us can make mistakes! And none of us should be rejected as junk. Don't you want to be a part of God's mercy-filled mission?

When God called Abraham from off the pathway of his ancestors to enter into a covenant with Him, God promised Abraham that He would bless him in order to be a blessing to others! That is still the desire of God for each of us! You are blessed by Him in order to be a blessing to others! Amen?

The lie is told by satan: that you're disgusting! You're unworthy! You're not fit to be a part of God's people! Some of you struggle to overcome the lie – but we are redeemed and born again when we hear God speak through His Church: You are a child of God! And there's nothing you can do that will ever tarnish His love for you! He wants you! We want you!

Family Blessing. So let's talk about what it means to be a blessing to others; to those in your family. Every marriage and every home offers the opportunity to create meaningful relationships. Our homes should be the place where our children are constantly encouraged and blessed!

So what does it mean to give a blessing? When we look at how the Bible describes a blessing, we find five elements:

- Meaningful and appropriate touch
- A spoken message
- Attaching high value to the one being blessed
- Picturing a special future for him or her
- An active commitment to fulfill the blessing

[The following section in colored font is an addition to the Sermon material offered, describing each of the five elements above.]

Meaningful Touch

Meaningful touch was an essential element in bestowing the blessing in Old Testament homes. So it was with Isaac when he went to bless his son. We read in Genesis 27:26 that Isaac said, "Come near now and kiss me, my son." This incident was not an isolated one. Each time the blessing was given in the Scriptures, a meaningful touch provided a caring background to the words that would be spoken. Kissing, hugging or the laying on of hands were all a part of bestowing the blessing.

Meaningful touch has many beneficial effects. The act of touch is key in communicating warmth, personal acceptance, affirmation, even physical health. For any person who wishes to bless a child, touch is an integral part of that blessing.

A Spoken Message

The second element of the blessing involves a spoken message — one that is actually put into words. In many homes today such words of love and acceptance are seldom received. For a child in search of the blessing, silence communicates mostly confusion. Children who are left to fill in the blanks when it comes to what their parents think about them will often fail the test when it comes to feeling valuable and secure. Spoken or written words at least give the child an indication that he or she is worthy of some attention.

Abraham spoke his blessing to his son Isaac. Isaac spoke a blessing to his son Jacob. Jacob gave a verbal blessing to each of his twelve sons and to two of his grandchildren. When God blessed us with the gift of his Son, it was his Word that "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). God has always been a God of words.

To see the blessing bloom and grow in the life of a child, we need to verbalize our message. Good intentions aside, good words — spoken, written and preferably both — are necessary to communicate genuine acceptance.

Attaching High Value

To convey the blessing, the words must attach high value to the person being blessed. In blessing Jacob (thinking it was Esau), Isaac said, “Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed... Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you.” (Genesis 27:27, 29) That pictures a very valuable person! Not just anybody merits having nations bow down to him!

Picturing a Special Future

A fourth element of the blessing is the way it imagines a special future for the person being blessed. Isaac said to his son Jacob, “May God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth. ... Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you” (Gen. 27:28–29).

Even today, Jewish homes are noted for picturing a special future for their children. One story I heard illustrates this activity very well.

Sidel, a young Jewish mother, was proudly walking down the street, pushing a stroller with her infant twins. As she rounded the corner, she saw her neighbor, Sarah. “My, what beautiful children,” Sarah cooed. “What are their names?” Pointing to each child, Sidel replied, “This is Bennie, the doctor, and Reuben, the lawyer.”

This woman believed her children had great potential and a special future before them. Isaac believed the same about his son and communicated that in his blessing — as we should communicate to those we seek to bless.

Today we cannot predict another person’s future with such accuracy. But we can help those we are blessing see a future that is full of light and opportunity. We can let them know we believe they can build an outstanding life and future with the strengths and abilities God has given them.

Our Lord himself speaks quite eloquently about our future in the Bible. In fact, He goes to great lengths to assure us of our relationship with Him and of the ocean full of blessings in store for us as His children. We need to picture just such a special future for our children if we are serious about giving them our blessing.

An Active Commitment

The last element of the blessing concerns the responsibility that goes with giving the blessing. Parents today, in particular, need to rely on the Lord to give them the strength and staying power to confirm their children’s blessing by expressing such an active commitment.

Why is active commitment so important when it comes to bestowing the blessing? Words alone cannot communicate the blessing; they need to be backed with a willingness to do everything possible to help the one blessed be successful. We can tell a child, “You have the talent to be a very good pianist.” But if we neglect to provide a piano for that child to practice on, our lack of commitment has undermined our message.

When it comes to spending time together or helping develop a certain skill, some children hear, “Wait until the weekend.” Then it becomes, “Wait until another weekend” so many times that they no longer believe the words of blessing.

The fifth element of the blessing, an active commitment, is crucial to communicating the blessing in our homes. [This is taken from John Trent and Gary Smalley, author of *The Blessing*]

This world can be a tough place. It's filled with trials, pain and heartache. Quite often, by day's end, your spouse's heart is bruised, battered and bloodied. He or she may feel discouraged,

frustrated or hurt. And yet, in the midst of life's trials, your spouse has been given a special gift: you.

Every day you have the opportunity to give your spouse what we call "the blessing." At the end of a difficult day, a discouraged spouse may need to hear someone say, "I hope your boss knows how fortunate he is to have you." After a stressful day with the kids, the words "You're an amazing mom" can re-energize an exhausted heart. That kind of blessing communicates honor and value.

The Enemy works tirelessly to negate your spouse's gifts and to minimize his or her talents and abilities, but you have an incredible opportunity to recognize and affirm these things. Is your spouse a gifted leader? Tell her. Speak life into your spouse's heart and express love by giving him or her the blessing.

For older children, the blessing can become even more powerful – especially when you use all five elements as a reaction to a teen's struggles or challenges. That's what one mother did for a high school senior. John Trent, a Christian Counselor, tells his story:

I'll never forget sitting at her old kitchen table with my head down, waiting for what I expected would come next: She would echo the words of others: "Why can't you do as well as your brother? You're twins, right?" That day, my teacher said even more than that with his actions.

He had held my senior term paper as if it were covered in mold. Then he had rolled his eyes before handing it back to me. The rest of the class smirked and hooted. On it was a large D, underlined in red pen.

That wasn't my first D, but I'd worked really hard on that paper. And while I did skip my teacher's instruction to include footnotes, he made it clear that I was a loser. I waited for my mom to finish reading my paper.

Finally she spoke. "John, look at me."

She had already read my twin brother's term paper – for which he had earned an A, as always.

"Look at me," she repeated.

I raised my head, just enough for my eyes to meet hers. When I did, she reached across the table and took my hand.

My mother was a rheumatoid arthritic, and her hands were twisted and bent. Her grip was incredibly soft, but once she held my hand, I couldn't pull away without hurting her and making her cry. I was stuck.

I felt broken and ashamed.

She said, "John, you should have woken me up, and I could have helped you with the footnotes." When I dropped my head again, she continued, "I don't care what your teacher said or wrote. You do such a good job using words when you write that I wouldn't be surprised if God used your words someday to help people."

At that moment, she gave me a gift that continues to shape my life today. She used the five elements of biblical blessing to let me know I had worth:

Meaningful touch – With her grip, she said, "I love you. I believe in you."

Words of love and acceptance – My mother's words were direct, and even when what she said wasn't what I wanted to hear, she spoke with gentle kindness.

Value placed on the child – She saw the potential in me, and her words spoke of my value.

Acknowledgment of a special future – She pointed me toward a future where God might use my words someday to help others.

Genuine commitment – My mom wasn't perfect. She got tired and was frustrated with me at times, but I never doubted her love or commitment to me.

Whether you are husbands or wives, fathers or mothers, or you provide counsel and care to people, find ways to counteract the negative messages that would break a dream or destroy confidence for those who live around you in need of blessing! The good news of the Gospel is that you are loved, forgiven, offered the gift of grace and you are of such great value in the eyes of God that you were worth dying for. This does not mean we excuse sinful behavior and poor choices or never hold people accountable, but let's be proactive as we have the opportunity to bless others in the eyes of God.

So many people are buried in negativity, often by their own doing. But God's healing comes through your faith, trusting His offer to love you – not *because...* or *since...* you did such-and-such, or *if* you ever accomplish... or *after* you get your life together! God doesn't love based on conditions – *because, since, if, or after...*! God loves you because God is love! And you can reject His love, you can refuse God's love – but you cannot stop God from loving you!

Prayer:

O God, Give of Life, Bearer of Pain, Maker of Love,
 You are able to accept in us what we cannot even acknowledge;
 You are able to name in us what we cannot bear to speak of;
 You are able to hold in Your memory what we have tried to forget;
 You are able to hold out to us the glory that we cannot conceive of.

Reconcile us through Your cross to all that we have rejected in our selves, that we may find no part of Your creation to be alien or strange to us, and that we ourselves may be made whole. Through Jesus Christ, our lover and our friend. Amen – *Janet Morley, England*