

# **DAD BLESS YOU**

## **Giving and Receiving the Father's Best**

**Text: Genesis 27:1-38**

### **The Birthright & The Blessing**

The scenario we read about in Genesis 27 is somewhat puzzling isn't? What was it about a father's "blessing" that was so important that it could drive a faithful woman like Rebekah to betray her own husband to make sure her son received it? What was it about this blessing that would lead a sensitive soul like Jacob to deceive his father and risk death at the hands of his brother just to get it? What about this gift would make an inveterate tough-guy like Esau weep and plead for his father to endow him with it the way he had his younger brother?

To answer those questions, it's very important to understand that in ancient times Hebrew fathers typically gave out TWO MAJOR GIFTS during their lifetimes. One of those gifts was called "the birthright." As some point, a Jewish father would formally bequeath his material assets to one of his children, usually the eldest son, to do with as he chose. Needless to say, if you happened to be the eldest, you really scored. If you weren't the eldest, you needed to fend for yourself or depend on the charity of your older sibling to give you a job on the family estate or otherwise take care of you. How many of you would want the birthright? You can imagine how this made for cheerful family relationships!

But there was also another gift that Dad gave out and this one was regarded as even more valuable than the birthright. It was called "the blessing." At some point late in his life, a Hebrew father would call his most favored child to him and perform a special ritual which conferred upon that child a treasure not of material wealth but of spiritual assets. Dad would pass on an irrevocable gift of faith, hope, and love that would become a vital force for the good within the soul of that child for the rest of his or her days. Someone who had received the blessing could handle the pains and struggles of life with a peace and assurance that those without the blessing never could. The external world might menace and change, but the blessed ones would face life with an inner endowment that could not be taken away.

The power to bless another person in that way is still given to the fathers and grandfathers of this world and is therefore a pretty important topic for Father's Day. It needs to be said, however, that through the power of the Holy Spirit, blessing is something which all of us can offer to key people in our lives. For that reason, I want to take the time to unpack for you what the act of conferring this powerful blessing really involved on the chance that we'll see some pretty significant application in our lives. Will you go back and look

closely at the Genesis story with me today?

### **Meaningful Touch**

Verse 26 reads: **"Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come here, my son, and kiss me. So [Jacob] went to him and kissed him."** . It's important you picture that embrace between father and son, because to confer the blessing, the first thing a Hebrew Dad did was provide or invite a meaningful touch of some kind.

Have you ever noticed that the Bible is literally jammed full of examples of people physically touching one another as an expression of grace and love? In the story of the prodigal son, how does the famous father express his forgiveness of his wayward child? He embraces him (Luke 15:20b). In the story of the alabaster jar, how does a peasant woman demonstrate her devotion to Jesus? She pours perfume on him and washes his feet with her hair and her tears (Luke 7:38). In his encounter with an outcast leper, how does Jesus show his acceptance? He reaches out and touches them (Luk 5:12-13).

And conferring a blessing still works this way today. It is why we physically touch people with the sign of the cross when we baptize them? It's why we lay hands on the sick as we pray for them, or upon leaders as we commission them for their tasks. It's why we reach out with a warm handshake or heartfelt hug when we greet an arriving guest. We know that babies will literally die if they are not touched and that people in rest homes will more likely thrive if they are given a frequent arm around the shoulder, a gentle squeeze of the hand, or kiss on the cheek.

God has given TOUCH the power to confer a sense of "belovedness" that strengthens us for life. Obviously, such touch must always be given with care and respect for the wishes and boundaries of another; but in the right context, a meaningful touch can do more good than a thousand words could. Dads and others, are we giving enough of this blessing to the people who need and want it?

### **Spoken Words of Value**

Don't get me wrong, words have their place too. Howard Hendricks tells the story of a husband in marriage counseling who was asked when the last time was that he told his wife that he loved her. The husband replied with arms crossed, "I told my wife that I loved her on our wedding day and it stands until I revoke it!" Now contrast that statement with the one made in verse 27 of our Old Testament passage: **"When Isaac caught the smell of [Jacob's] clothes, he blessed him and said: 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.'"**

Some time ago I stood at a graveside with a group of family and friends just

before the coffin containing the earthly remains of their loved one was lowered into the ground. I listened as, one-by-one, people in that sweet congregation spoke of the qualities they cherished in the woman we were laying to rest. It was clear that this father and grandfather had played a remarkable role in each of their lives. And yet I know that part of the reason for the tears that flowed was the realization that few of them had fully articulated to him just how much he meant to them.

"Honey, I just love the way you smell when you wear that aftershave." "Son, I don't say it often enough, but I am really proud of you." "My dear daughter, you have such a wonderful way with people." "Sweetheart, just seeing your smile lifts my spirits more than you know." Don't worry about saying something which someone already knows. Don't worry about inflating somebody's ego, or sounding eloquent, or having them keep coming back for more. Just say it, like God the Father says it. "Behold, this is my son... my daughter... my friend... my loved one... in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 17:5). Be a bearer of that blessing that comes first through a meaningful touch, and then secondly, through spoken words of value.

### **A Special Pictured Future**

There is a third and final component to the blessing that some of us in this room are in a particularly good position to bestow. It is the offering to someone else of a special pictured future. Hear how Isaac does that for Jacob. My son, he says: **"May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness – an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed"** (Gen 27:28-29).

You know, when Isaac spoke those words, Jacob was not all that much to look at. He was a lad with a certain conniving streak that might become ingenuity if given the proper watering. He had a shrewd intelligence that might become the stuff of leadership if nurtured in the right way. He was a boy of simple means who might parlay them into a respectable fortune if he didn't fall in with the wrong crowd. And yet, as tempting as it must have been to say: "Son, no one's ever going to want to date a messy guy like you"; or "Son, if you don't develop better manners, you're going to be an embarrassment to your mom and me"; or maybe "Child, with your work habits you'd better hope you can find someone to take care of you when you get older" -- Isaac says instead: "Child of mine, I believe there are great things in store for you, and I'm betting that – with God's help -- you'll make the most of them."

For what it's worth, the historical record shows that Jacob did. Jacob, whose name God changed to "Israel," grew to become the ingenious, prosperous, and faithful leader his father had pictured for him. I believe it can be the same for

the people we bless. We can say: "I see you're struggling with your studies right now, but you've got a fine mind that God is going to use greatly in the years to come." Or "I really hurt with you during this tough time, but I believe God is tempering your character because he has great plans for you. Or "I've noticed how thoughtful and observant you are; I bet you're going to be an incredible spouse... a great parent... an extraordinary mentor someday."

### **The Blessing of Your Heavenly Father**

Few things make such a difference in this world as when we bestow the blessing on others. I want to give a manly knuckle bump to every one of you dads who HAS given that meaningful touch, or spoken those words of value, or pictured for someone who needed it the special future you saw for them. We live in a culture that is always finding fault with fathers or picturing them on TV as bumbling buffoons. But I know hundreds of guys that are powerful agents of good in the lives of their kids. So DAD, BLESS YOU for all the good you've done.

I know that none of us parents perfectly. It's hard to keep it all together at times. It's harder still if we ourselves didn't receive enough of the blessing ourselves along life's way. That's why it's important to remember that all of us DO have a Dad who loves us unfailingly. Author Philip Yancey once shared his own discovery of that truth, and with his story I'll leave us today.

While rummaging through an old box of photographs, Phillip Yancey came upon a severely mangled picture of himself as an infant of not more than 10 months old. The photo had been taken just a little while before his father's death. The elder Yancey had contracted spinal bulbar polio, a condition that ultimately rendered him completely paralyzed by age 24. In 1950, polio was regarded with as much fear and misunderstanding as AIDS is today, so Philip's father was relegated to spending the last several months of his life inside an iron lung, sequestered away from his family and friends. Unable to move and struggling even to speak, the only brightness in his father's life was supplied by the photographs of his wife and precious child that were stuffed between the metal knobs on top of the iron lung.

Yancey writes: "When my mother told me the story of the crumpled photo, I had a strange and powerful reaction. It seemed odd for me to imagine someone caring about me whom, in a sense, I had never met. During the last few months of his life, my father had spent his waking hours staring at those images of his family, my family... [for] there was nothing else in his field of view. What did he do all day? I wondered. Did he pray for us? Yes, surely. Did he love us? Yes, but how can a paralyzed person express his love, especially when his own children are banned from the room?

"Someone I have no sensory knowledge of, spent all day every day thinking of

me, devoting himself to me, loving me as well as he could. Perhaps, in some mysterious way, he is doing so now in another dimension. Perhaps [one day] I will have time, much time, to renew our relationship... I mention this story because the emotions I felt when my mother showed me the crumpled photo were the very same emotions I felt [one] February night in a college dorm room when I first believed in a God of love. Someone is there, I realized... Someone is watching life as it unfolds on this planet. More [than that], Someone is there who loves me. It was a startling feeling of wild hope, a feeling so overwhelming [and true] that it seemed fully worth risking my life on."

It still is, my friends. It still is. May your heavenly Dad bless you also this day and continue to help you pass on the blessing to the many you know who need it.

Let's pray together...

Great God, we know that you love us with a firmness and a tenderness that even our own earthly parents can only approximate. If there is any one here today who has not yet discovered the blessing of your passion for him or her, then reach out and touch that person today. Fill every open soul in this room with the peace that comes from turning over every sin and hurt of our hearts to your loving hands. Fill every one of us with that joy that comes from knowing that you have a wonderful plan for each of us here, and a glorious kingdom that awaits us beyond this time. Then, strengthened by that blessing, send us forth from here today to be bearers of your blessing to the world. For we pray these things, Father, Abba, Dad, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Blessing*, p. 53.  
Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, p. 254-55.

