



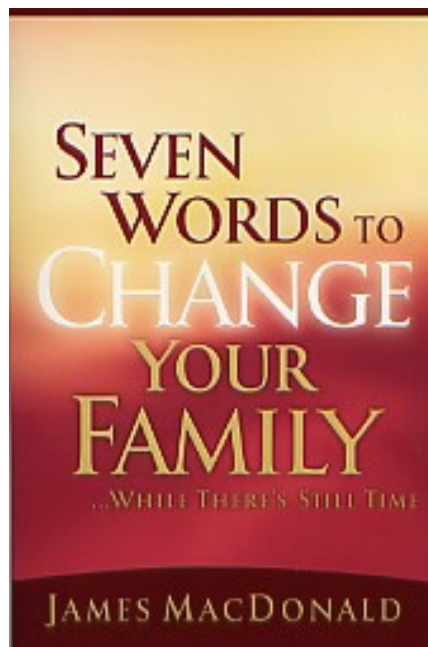
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STICKS AND STONE MAY BREAK MY BONES, BUT...
[GENESIS 27:1-40]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

DECEMBER 9, 2007

FROM THE *MASTERWORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES, BUT...

[GENESIS 27:1-40]

Before my son-in-law, Bryan, proposed to my daughter Amy a couple of years ago, do you know what he did? He called me on the phone from Columbia and wanted to drive to the beach from Columbia and take me to lunch. Wonder why? That's just what he did too, three and one-half hours for an hour lunch—but the reason was important to him. He told me he loved my daughter Amy and wanted to marry her and would like **MY** blessing. I thought to myself, *"I didn't know people still did this!"* Did that mean if I said no, he'd not marry her? Ha! Obviously, I was thrilled at such an honor and gave him by blessing.

Today we continue with Week Two of our study from Dr. James MacDonald's book, *Seven Words To Change Your Family*. Last week, do you remember the word? [FORGIVENESS] Well, this week, it's the second word that can CHANGE your family. On page 19, during Day One of your study this week, Dr. MacDonald said, *"Deep within the heart of every person is a longing for parental approval."* **Why is approval so important to us? Why did my future son-in-law go to all the trouble to ask ME for my blessing? What does it take to feel approved?**

I used to love to read the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books and recall many inspirational stories—many of which we talked about in this class. One of them was by Ted Kruger, who wrote: *"I have many memories about my father and about growing up with him in our apartment next to the elevated train tracks. For years we listened to the roar of the train as it passed by. Late at night, my father waited alone for the train that took him to a factory where he worked the night shift. On this particular night, I waited with him in the dark to say good-bye. His face was grim; his youngest son had been drafted. I would be sworn in at six the next morning while he was at the factory. My father didn't want them to take his child, only 19 years old, to fight a war in Europe. He placed his*

hands on my shoulders and said, 'You be careful, and if you need anything, write to me and I'll see that you get it.' Suddenly he heard the roar of the approaching train. He held me tightly in his arms and gently kissed me on the cheek. With tear-filled eyes, he murmured, 'I love you, my son.' Then the train arrived, the doors closed him inside, and he disappeared into the night....and I left for boot camp.

One month later, at age 46, my father died. I am 76 as I sit and write this. I once heard Pete Hamill, the New York reporter, say that memories are man's greatest inheritance, and I have to agree. I've lived through four invasions in World War II. I've had a life full of all kinds of experiences. But the only memory that lingers is the night my dad said, 'I love you, my son.'"

From that story about Ted Krueger's dad and even the more personal account of Bryan asking for my blessing BEFORE he proposed to my daughter, we know the incredible power of a father's blessing. A wonderful, empowering inheritance truly. Yet it is so easy to fail to pass on this much needed blessing to our children. Our study this week concerned itself with a father's blessing from **Genesis 27**—so our word is naturally **BLESSING**.

As we did last week with the word "*forgiveness*," let's begin with a good definition of what we're talking about. **What is blessing and in what form does it come?** *"The blessing is a formula of words that expresses fondness, confidence in, and recognition of a specific person."* In Old Testament times, there was a point in every Jewish family for a formal blessing ceremony—and every child received it, both males and females—although there seems to be within men a greater need for it. This normally took place between the ages of 14 and 16 and when the process was complete, the father would lift his teenage child onto his shoulders and dance about the room in celebration—saying, in effect, this is my child in whom I am well pleased. Now it's not done that way in our society today—**so how do we get the blessing today?** How

do we communicate it today? There's a five-step process we'll talk about in a minute.

Turn to the **GENESIS 27**, the story of Isaac bestowing his blessing to Jacob. You remember the story. Of course, the blessing was intended for the oldest son, Esau. But through deception the blessing was given to Jacob instead. As you may remember, Isaac and Rebecca had twin sons, Esau and Jacob, who were not anything alike. Esau was an outdoorsman with hairy arms and hands and he loved hunting and fishing. Jacob was more of a homebody, and spent a lot of time with his mother.

As you see in the first few verses of Genesis 27 (1-29), Isaac has grown old and blind and decides it is time to pass on the blessing to his oldest son. As we just discussed, a Jewish father's blessing was special and here it was a formal passing on of the father's honor and authority to his oldest son. And since the oldest son was assuming the leadership responsibilities of the family or tribe, he also received a double share of his father's possessions. So the bestowing of the blessing was a very important event indeed.

Let's pick up reading **verses 2-4** (NIV), where Isaac tells Esau, *"I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. Now then, get your weapons—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."* So Esau leaves and while he is gone, Rebecca seizes the opportunity to secure the blessing for Jacob, who was her favorite. She quickly prepares some tasty food and tells Jacob to put on Esau's best clothes. To help fool blind old Isaac, she puts goat skin on Jacob's hands and arms to make them feel hairy. Then she sends him in with the food to ask for the blessing.

Look down now at **verse 19**, *"Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat*

some of my game so that you may give me your blessing.'" Now Isaac was suspicious because Jacob's voice didn't sound like Esau's. So he asked in **verse 20**, *"How did you find it so quickly, my son?" Jacob replies, "The Lord your God gave me success, he replied."* Then continuing with **verse 21**, *"Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.' Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him."*

Now the blessing that was given is found in **verses 27-29**, ²⁷*"So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. ²⁸May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness - an abundance of grain and new wine. ²⁹May 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."* After he received the blessing from his father, Jacob left. Shortly after, Esau came in with the game that he had killed and prepared and was ready to receive his father's blessing.

Now, listen to **verses 33-34**, ³³*"Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!'* ³⁴*When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, 'Bless me—me too, my father!'"*

Now, let's talk about the HOW part of communicating the blessing from these verses. From Day Two, we see the first step in the process. The first ingredient was a meaningful touch. Notice verse 22, *"Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him."* Then,

down in verse 26, it says, *"Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come here, my son, and kiss me.'"* Now this is not an isolated incident in scripture. Almost every time a blessing is bestowed in Hebrew culture, it involves touching—the laying on of hands, a kiss, an embrace—something that conveys acceptance and love.

In **MARK 10: 14, 16**, people brought children to Jesus so that He could **TOUCH** them. Jesus took them and placed them on his knee, and laid His hands upon them, and the scripture says in verse 16 that He *"began blessing them."* Jesus knew exactly what children need to feel loved and accepted. So He touched them and blessed them.

It's important to do that in **our** homes, too—but it's hard for many of us, especially we men (according to my wife). When children are very small you can't communicate love with words because they don't understand words yet. So, the best way to communicate love to a very small child is to demonstrate it by touching them, cuddling them, and holding them close.

I find it amazing, however, that Jacob was 40 years old when Isaac touched him and kissed him to convey the blessing to him. But no matter the age, Dr. MacDonald is telling us that it is important to continue to communicate love and acceptance and affection in some meaningful way. So, the first part of the blessing was a **MEANINGFUL TOUCH**.

The **SECOND** part of the blessing was **SPOKEN WORDS**. Dr. MacDonald tells us that a blessing is not a blessing until it is spoken. Look again at **verse 27** and listen as Jacob blesses his son in the last part of verse 27, *"Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field. . ."* Now I suppose that today's child would not consider it a compliment to be told, "You smell like a field. I just wanted you to know that." But to an outdoorsman like Isaac, who thought he was speaking to Esau, the smell of a field about ready

for harvest was a great smell. It was a compliment, a positive message that communicated his love and affection.

You see, too often parents are quick to criticize and remind children of their mistakes. "You dummy, why did you spill the milk?" "You're lazy." "You're too fat." "You only made three "A's" on your report card, why didn't you make all "A's"?" Words of criticism that really don't accomplish much. All they do is cause a child to withdraw. (HANDOUT WORDS FOR YOUR FAMILY SHEET) **Can anyone recall a time when someone spoke words to you that made you feel loved? Who has a story?**

I think there is room for constructive criticism. But it's more important to communicate love through words that say, "You're worth something. I'm glad that God gave you to us. You're better than any Christmas present I could ever receive. Today is special just because you're here." Those are words that communicate acceptance and love. And they need to be spoken over and over again, even when our children stumble and fall, but please don't wait until the last minute to do it.

Moving to the THIRD part of the blessing, **AFFIRMING YOUR CHILD'S VALUE**. Notice what Isaac says in verse 28, *"May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine."* He's saying, "You're special, so God will give you the best He has to give." We're constantly being told that we should teach our children and grandchildren to have a good, positive self-image, to build up their self-esteem. So it is important to teach the child, "You're so valuable that God even came into our world and died on the cross for you." But it's not just by words. We teach high value in a number of ways.

A lot of times when a child comes, we're so busy. We have one eye on the TV and one eye on them, and we can't concentrate on what they're saying. So when a child comes to talk to you, turn off the

radio or TV set. Lay aside the newspaper and look them in the eye. You'll see wonder after wonder when you look into a child's eyes, sparkling with excitement. They have so many things they're anxious to tell you. So look at them and listen to what they have to say!

The **FOURTH** part of the blessing we studied on Day Four, page 26, is **SPIRITUAL VISION**. In verse 29, Isaac says to Jacob, *"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."* Isaac is helping him to raise his sights and see that his future is bright. That is an important responsibility of parents, isn't it? We all know that passage in **PROVERBS 22:6** that says, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* We've always made a spiritual application there, *"Teach them the things of God and when they're old they will not forsake them."*

We're to help our children find their niche, discover who they are, and why they've been made. God made them special. So as they're growing up, help them understand their gifts and talents, and what they're best suited to do in life. What does Jesus tell us that the greatest commandment is? Listen to the words from **MARK 12: 30 (NIV)**, *³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* So, how do we do that? We constantly encourage and tell our children to put God first—to remind them of what kind of Father he was for us and what His plans are for us. (Remember, **JEREMIAH 29:11**) Give them a spiritual vision.

Maybe you heard the story about a little girl named Sandra who was raised in an adobe house in a rural area of New Mexico, without electricity and running water. In fact, her mother and father had to drive to El Paso, 200 miles away, so that her mother

could be in the hospital when Sandra was born. Because they were so far away from any school, Sandra's parents home-schooled her. They ordered a variety of magazines to expose her to the outside world. She grew up in a very wholesome environment.

Sandra's fondest memories of her family are of the times when mom and dad took the whole family on vacation to visit state capitols. They went into every capitol building and climbed their domes, west of the Mississippi. When Sandra graduated from high school, she went to Stanford University and graduated with honors. She became a lawyer and excelled in her career. Years later, Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman to be seated in the Supreme Court of the United States of America. All because mom and dad cared enough to help her see herself in the image in which God created her. And then to encourage her to be all that she could be.

Closely tied into this vision is **PROSPEROUS VISION**. It is not biblical to pray for our children to be wealthy. As we learned over the last few weeks of our study in *The Treasure Principle*, living in America generally puts us in the top one percent of the wealthiest people in the world. We need to pray that our children will be prosperous in this world and that they will rise up and be successful by Kingdom standards and be stewards of what they have for Christ's *kingdom*.

In the providence of God, our biological families are the primary place for us to receive blessings. It is, however, not the only place. The family of God is also expected to be a place where blessings are given. The Body of Christ or the church exists to bless people. God expects us to bless one another. From earliest times God's people have been called to be a blessing to others. When God first called Abraham, He gave him a specific promise. In **GENESIS 12:2-3**, God said to Abraham: ***'I WILL BLESS YOU.....AND YOU SHALL BE A BLESSING.'*** Some people don't have

biological families to bless them so God seeks to bless them through the family of God.

God blesses us with the intention that we, in turn, bless others. That is our divine calling in life. When God's people are blessing others the church becomes a powerful, life-giving, life-lifting force for good. Encouraging words, listening ears, helping hands, caring ways and empathetic hearts are avenues through which we bless others. Sometimes we bless people by just accepting them as they are. We bless people by introducing them to Jesus Christ. Sometimes the blessing comes as we invite someone into our world to spend some time with us or by sharing of our temporal resources. Through the Wither's Swash ministry of our church, we can bless many hurting, hungry, homeless folk. The ironic thing is that as we bless others, we, in turn, are blessed.

Our children, someone young and old, need help in deciding what it is they want to do, where it is they want to do it, and how to give it a whole-hearted effort while being careful to balance the other responsibilities in life. Our son, Adam, as many of you know, is struggling in a failed marriage, loss of a job with the law firm his wife also worked at, and a lack of direction for his life and career. Just as Mordecai told Esther in **ESTHER 4:14**, Beverly and I believe and know that God has put us here for Adam for such a time as this.

In closing, John Dresser wrote a book titled, *If I Could Do It All Again*. In it he shares 8 things that he would do **DIFFERENTLY** if he could go through his years of being a parent and father all over again. Here is what Dresser wrote:

1. "First of all, if I could do it all over again, I would love my wife more, because by loving my children's mother more, I would create an environment of security in our home. Our love would be something they could see - something they would never have to worry about."

2. "Second, I would laugh more. I would relax and enjoy my children and laugh at their antics. I would spend more time with them and enjoy being a father."

3. "Third, I would present a more realistic model for them to follow. I would be honest with them about myself. I would let them know that I had problems in school, too, that I stumbled, and made mistakes, and failed. I would let them know that I understand, and that they can come to me when they fail, because I have been there as well."

4. "Fourth, I would listen to what they say. I would listen to their pains and problems and worries and concerns. I would listen when they wanted to talk to me, because now I realize that if I listen to them when they are small, and to their little problems, then when they are big, and have big problems, they will still come and talk with me."

5. "Fifth, I would stop praying so much for my family, and start praying more for myself, because a father's prayers so often sound something like this, 'God, make my son and daughter good people. Help them to succeed in school. Help them to find the right person to marry. Take care of them and protect them.' We're always praying for them, it seems." "But I would start praying more for myself, that I might be the right kind of father, realizing that when I become the right kind of father, my children will probably be the right kind of children."

6. "Sixth, I would pay more attention to little things. I would begin to appreciate the touch of love and the word of encouragement. So many times we fathers are quick to criticize their failures, and so slow to praise and encourage them when they do something right."

7. "Seventh, I would create an environment of belonging. I would want my children to know that they belong, and that they are

important family members, because I realize that there are going to be people saying to them, 'Join this and join that.' But if they have a solid identity in the home and in the family they will not easily be led astray."

8. "Last, but certainly not least, I would make God an intimate friend of my family. I would use His name freely. I would communicate to them that He is involved in all our family decisions. I would want them to see me pray and read God's Word and search for His direction and leadership."

God is the perfect parent who has conveyed to us all the ingredients of His blessing in just one verse of scripture. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son and who ever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."*

Let's pray!

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